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John Howe

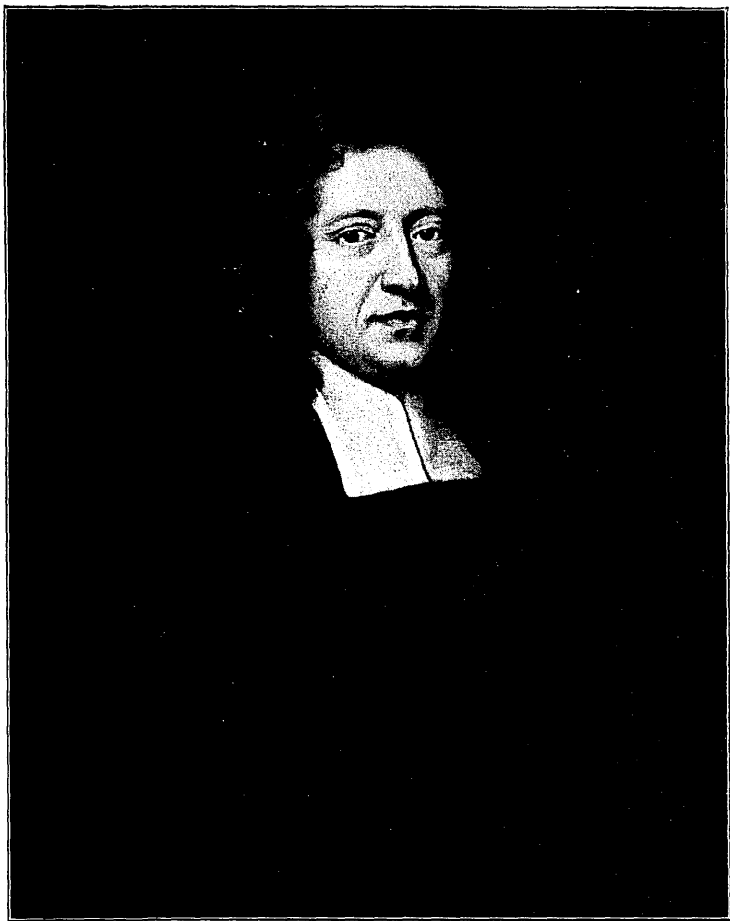


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JOHN HOWE

The Life of John Howe

BY

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CHAPTER I

Birth, Education and Ordination

IT has often been asserted that there is no better way of understanding the history, inner vitality and essential significance of any great movement than by a patient and sympathetic study of the personalities most intimately associated with it. Indeed, no movement can be rightly understood apart from an understanding of the lives of its authors and inspirers; and this is peculiarly true of all religious movements. To understand English dissent it is necessary to understand the early dissenters. We shall mistake its origin, misunderstand its motives, and misjudge its ideals, unless we view it in the light shed from the lives of those whence it sprang. The man explains the movement, the movement does not explain the man. Many men contributed to English dissent, but perhaps none made greater worthier contribution than John Howe.

The materials for a full and detailed life of Howe do not exist, for the manuscripts containing the history of his public and private life, "stitched up in a multitude of small volumes, were destroyed by his son, Dr. George Howe, at his father's dying wish. We can only surmise the motive which lay behind this request; it may have been charity or modesty, but it is almost certain that, if these papers had been preserved, our knowledge both of the writer himself and the history of religion in his day would have been more exact and suggestive than is now possible. Carlyle has laid us all under an immeasurable debt by his *Cromwell*; but could we have read the pages of Howe's *Journal* we might have found among many interesting *data* an intimate record of the court of Cromwell laid bare to us, surpassing all we now know.

John Howe was born at Loughborough, in Leicestershire, on 17th May, 1630. His father (brother of Obadiah Howe

D.D.), was at this time curate to John Browne, rector of Loughborough, but in 1634 he was suspended as an "irregular curate" by the high commission court, imprisoned and fined £500 (afterwards reduced to £20) for praying "that the young prince might not be brought up in popery." He thereupon took his family to Ireland, an ejected clergyman, returning to England during the rebellion of 1641, and settled in Lancashire, where it is believed he served one of the chapelries dependent on Winwick, near Wigan.

Of John Howe as schoolboy and undergraduate we know little. From the grammar school at Winwick, under Ralph Gorse, B.A., he entered Christ's College, Cambridge, as a sizar on his seventeenth birthday. It was here that he formed a lasting friendship with Henry More, and became acquainted with Ralph Cudworth and John Smith. To his association with the thoughts of these men Calamy ascribes Howe's "platonick tincture," and certainly his writings distil a fragrance not a whit less pure and serene than those of the "Cambridge Platonists." Howe took his Cambridge degree in 1648, and in the Michaelmas term of that year removed to Oxford (a common practice in the seventeenth century) as Bible clerk of Brasenose College, where he became B.A., 18th January, 1649, and M.A., 9th July, 1652. In this year Howe was elected fellow of Magdalen College, the president of which was Dr. Thomas Goodwin. Howe tells us that his "most inward friend" at Cambridge was Thomas Wadsworth; at Oxford his intimate was Spilsbury, and his contemporaries Thomas Dawson and Theophilus Gale. It was at Magdalen that Howe was admitted on "catholic terms" to the Congregational church meeting at the president's lodging; and it was here undoubtedly that Howe came to hold those principles of Church life and polity which afterwards determined his ecclesiastical position. It cannot be too often pointed out that it was not narrowness of view or bigoted intolerance which afterwards forced Howe in common with other ejected ministers into Nonconformity, but rather a genuine catholicity and a large and living faith. This catholicity and faith is seen in the making during his years of university life.

Undoubtedly they were years of wide reading, deep thought and growing faith. In addition to his classical and philosophical studies he "thoroughly studied the Scriptures," and from them drew up "a body of divinity for himself and for his own use, which he saw very little occasion to vary from,

in compliance with the schemes of others." He had a full and rich knowledge of the English Bible, and a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, sufficient at least for a careful discussion of passages in the original languages.

The year following his election as fellow of Magdalen Howe was ordained at Winwick, in Lancashire, by the gifted and esteemed Charles Herle, the minister of the parish, assisted by the ministers of the several chapelries of the



THE OLD CHURCH OF GREAT TORRINGTON

This church, which was used as a magazine for the Royalist powder, was blown up after the engagement on 16th Feb., 1646, and re-erected 1651.

district. Herle had taken a leading part in the establishing of the Presbyterian system in Lancashire, and his spiritual influence was great. He was revered by Howe, who regarded him as a "primitive bishop"; and it is recorded that Howe was accustomed to say few ministers in modern times had so truly primitive an ordination as he. Howe regarded his ordination as episcopal, in the true sense of the New Testament usage and practice, and when in the dark days of 1662 re-ordination

at the hands of bishops was suggested, Howe would never entertain the idea. No doubt of the reality or validity of his ordination ever crossed Howe's mind.

In 1654 the perpetual curacy of Great Torrington, in Devonshire, became vacant. This curacy was in the gift of Christ Church, Oxford, of which Dr. Owen, an Independent, was dean. Although Howe had been ordained in a Presbyterian centre and by a Presbyterian leader, he was appointed to succeed an Independent, Lewis Stukeley, at Torrington, "a place which leaned to the Independent ideal." We gather that, at the time of Howe's appointment, the parishioners were divided; and certainly no man was by temperament and training better fitted to heal the breaches and to restore the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace than John Howe. "Through God's blessing on his endeavours," he writes, the two parties in the church which he found "at his first coming to Torrington" speedily became one; and there can be little doubt that as "pastor of a Congregational church at Great Torrington" (to use Dr. Increase Mather's phrase) Howe spent some of the happiest years of his life. He held a sacred and shining ideal of the ministry, and his deep and sincere solicitude for the spiritual welfare of the people committed to his care may be gathered from the solemn urgency of many of the Torrington sermons.

His labours were abundant and unremitting. An account of the services held on the public fast days, which at the time were of frequent occurrence, will enable us to form some idea of the zeal and seriousness of Howe's public ministrations. From Howe's own lips Calamy received information, which he presents to his readers in the following words: "He told me it was upon those occasions his common way, to begin about nine in the morning, with a prayer for about a quarter of an hour, in which he begged a blessing on the work of the day; and afterwards read and expounded a chapter or psalm, in which he spent about three quarters of an hour, then prayed for about an hour, preached for another hour, and prayed for about half an hour. After this, he retired and took some little refreshment for about a quarter of an hour more (the people singing all the while), and then came again into the pulpit and prayed for another hour, and gave them another sermon of about an hour's length; and so concluded the service of the day, at about four of the clock in the evening, with about half an hour or more in prayer." Such days as

these, although common at that time, were specially seasons of penitence and confession of sin ; and in spite of a facile piety, which finds it amusing to contemplate and criticise such practices, it cannot be doubted that they indicate a religious enthusiasm and a moral concern which are entirely admirable. We may, perhaps, lawfully stigmatise such services in common with other religious practices of that age as extravagant and unprofitable, but we cannot deny the strenuousness and ardour of the worshippers' faith. Calamy admits that few people could have gone through such services without inexpressible weariness, both to themselves and their auditors ; though, as Rogers remarks, it is just conceivable that a man like Howe, distinguished by such exalted piety, by such rare qualifications as a preacher, and by a mind so singularly fertile and original, might sustain the attention of the more intelligent amongst his auditors, making allowance, it may be, for a few oblivious moments.

That Howe had special and peculiar spiritual qualifications cannot be doubted ; and he gives us the dominating passion, not only of his ministry at Torrington but of his whole life, when he states that "the serious practice of the great things of religion, which are known and least liable to question," was his first consideration.

It is not a thing to marvel at that such a man should have exercised a fruitful and beneficent ministry. Howe not only built up in the bonds of Christian fellowship and love the church at Torrington, but he succeeded in establishing a "settled meeting of the neighbouring ministers of *different persuasions*." The fellowship of kindred souls was very dear to the heart of Howe, and it is clear from his writings that his breadth of view and catholicity of temper were such that ecclesiastical differences and even theological divergences, if they did not encroach upon the rights of conscience, were no reasonable barrier to the real union of all true Christians. In writing of Howe's "latitude of sentiment," Rogers expresses the opinion that at no time did Howe's views exactly coincide with the Congregationalists, or indeed with any other party, though his opinions and practices, especially in all matters of discipline, more nearly coincided with those of the Congregationalists than with those of any other denomination ; though he adds that when following his own judgement and inclinations "he became *in fact* much more of a Congregationalist than anything else ; indeed, as it

respects his views of spiritual discipline, he was strictly so." Howe's true catholicity of mind thus brought him into close association with the other clergy of the county, and in particular with George Hughes, B.D., a Cambridge man, who exercised a very influential ministry at Plymouth. On March 1st, 1655, Howe married Katherine, the daughter of his friend Hughes, and thus the intimacy which had sprung up between the two men was further deepened. Of George Hughes Dr. Horton writes that we may safely count this brave, strong and faithful minister among the most powerful influences on Howe's spiritual development. Between the two friends a weekly correspondence in Latin was regularly maintained; unfortunately none of these letters have been preserved.

CHAPTER II

Whitehall

HOWE'S work at Torrington was not destined to remain uninterrupted, for in 1656 the perpetual curacy of St. Saviour's, Dartmouth, became vacant, and the desires of the parishioners (prompted perhaps by Hughes) turned towards Howe, though the name of Robert Jagoe was also mentioned in connection with the vacancy. The mists of uncertainty hang around the exact procedure adopted ; but it seems probable that Thomas Boon, a great friend of Howe's at Dartmouth, applied to Cromwell in order that the desired appointment might be made. Howe was in London on business at the close of 1656, and at Cromwell's request preached before the Protector at Whitehall Chapel. Presumably Cromwell desired to prove Howe's merits as a preacher, and certainly he adopted a strange and severe test ; for while a psalm was being sung, the Protector gave Howe a text on which he was to preach *extempore*. The preacher, nothing daunted, discoursed for two hours, and was turning the hour glass for a third when Cromwell stopped him, apparently well satisfied with Howe's ability. After some private conversation Cromwell signified his desire that "nothing would serve him but Howe must remove to London and become his domestic chaplain, and that he would take care that the people at Torrington should be supplied to their satisfaction." Thus, instead of the living of St. Saviour's, Dartmouth, Howe was offered the post of chaplain to Cromwell's household ; and whilst there is some uncertainty as to the manner of Howe's first introduction to the Protector, there is none as to the outcome of that introduction ; and although Howe was extremely unwilling to accept the offered position, his reluctance was at length overcome by the assurance that he would have the opportunity of rendering great service to religion in

the fulfilment of his duties as Cromwell's domestic chaplain. He accordingly signified his consent to the proposal, and removed with his family to Whitehall. At first, it was thought that the separation from his people at Torrington would be complete and final, but in the end matters were so adjusted as to enable Howe to spend three months of the year at Torrington, while a resident *locum tenens* should discharge the duties of the pastorate for the remaining nine months of the year and receive all the emoluments.

It is not difficult for us to surmise the reasons which prompted Cromwell to select Howe for his chaplain. In writing of the Protector Burnet remarks that in nothing was his good understanding better discovered than in seeking out able and worthy men, for all employments; and we can well believe that the remarkable intellectual and spiritual qualities of Howe would be fully appreciated by Cromwell. But in the light of the knowledge we now possess of Cromwell's character—a man “noted for a catholic spirit, desirous of the peace and unity of all the servants of Christ” (to use Baxter's expression)—it seems evident that his motive for desiring Howe must have been loftier than merely the gratification of possessing such an one in his household, a man of such “piety, prudence and reputation,” in view of what Rogers calls “the peculiar position in which the Protector stood to the religious factions of the age.” No doubt Howe was “the man whose influence would tend to soothe the irritable theological temper of the time, to heal divisions and schisms”; but more certain still it is that Cromwell was drawn to Howe by the confident expectation and belief that in Howe he would find a spiritual adviser such as his heart craved amid the distractions and mighty toils and tumults of his life. It was spiritual help that Cromwell looked for from his chaplain, and he had insight to see in Howe one pre-eminently suited by temperament and training to minister to that deep need; while we can well understand that Howe's unsullied integrity and discretion would be of the utmost service to Cromwell in his efforts to grant the fullest liberty to the various religious parties by which he was surrounded, while permitting privilege or ascendancy to none.

That Howe's services were thus requisitioned is clear from the following statement of Calamy: “Whilst he continued in Cromwell's family he was often put upon secret services; but

they were always honourable, and such as, according to the best of his judgement, might be to the benefit either of the public, or of particular persons. And when he was once engaged, he used all the diligence, and secrecy, and despatch he was able. Once, particularly, I have been informed, he was sent by Oliver in haste, upon a certain occasion, to Oxford, to a meeting of ministers there; and he made such despatch, that though he rode by St. Giles's church at twelve o'clock, he arrived at Oxford by a quarter after five. In short he so behaved himself in this station, that he had the ill will of as few as any man, and the particular friendship of the great Dr. Wilkins, who was afterwards Bishop of Chester, and several others, who were great supporters of real piety and goodness in those times, and afterwards eminent under the legal establishment."

That Howe keenly felt the great responsibility of his position in Cromwell's household, and that he realised it to be "a very considerable work to which he was called," may be gathered from his correspondence with Richard Baxter. The following extract from a letter dated "Whitehall, March 12th, '57," and addressed to Baxter, illustrates the earnest and conscientious manner in which Howe faced his new position. "If you can think it worth your while," he writes, "I should be exceeding desirous to hear from you, what you apprehend to be the main evils of the nation that you judge capable of redress by the present government?—what you conceive one in my station obliged to urge upon them as matter of duty in reference to the present state of the nation?—and how far you conceive such a one obliged to bear a public testimony, against their neglects, in preaching, after use of private endeavours; supposing that either they be not convinced that the things persuaded to are duties to them, or else, if they be, that it be from time to time pretended that other affairs of greater moment are before them for the present; which being secret to themselves, as I cannot certainly know that they are so, so nor can I deny but they may be. Sir, the Lord knows I desire to understand my duty in matters of this nature; I hope he will then give me a heart not to decline it."

In reading between the lines of Howe's correspondence with Baxter we may plainly discern evidences that Howe's position was far from congenial to him. He felt that the difficulties in the way of his performing his duties as

Cromwell's chaplain in a worthy manner were almost insuperable for a man of his temperament, with little taste for the surroundings or the society of a court, and although urged by Baxter to be "very tender and cautious in publishing any of the neglects of Governors," it is obvious that these "neglects," real or imaginary, affected Howe deeply. Doubtless his very anxiety to fulfil conscientiously and effectively the duties of his position led him to be unduly self-critical of his performance.

Yet of the generous consideration for others which always marked him, and his disinterestedness and integrity during the time in which he filled this difficult post, some examples have been preserved to us. Rogers in his *Life of Howe* writes: "Amongst many other Episcopalians whom he befriended in distress was the celebrated Seth Ward, afterward Bishop of Exeter, who always retained a grateful sense of Howe's kindness. It appears that Dr. Ward, who had been sometime Professor of Astronomy at Oxford, became a candidate for the Principalship of Jesus College in that University, on the resignation of Dr. Michael Roberts. A gentleman of Exeter College, Mr. Francis Howel, was another candidate. Dr. Ward, it seems, had the suffrages of a majority of the fellows in his favour; but, on the other hand, his opponent had obtained from the Protector a positive promise of the appointment. Dr. Ward, ignorant of this, was anxious to secure the same all powerful interest. For this purpose he applied to Howe, who, without promising much, promised to do all he could, and readily procured him an audience. When Dr. Ward had been introduced to the Protector Howe proceeded to speak, in terms of the strongest admiration, of his worth and learning; and intimated that it would be no very creditable thing if a man of such rare attainments, and who, moreover, was supported by a majority of the fellows, should fail in obtaining the principalship. Cromwell answered that Dr. Roberts had resigned his office into his hands; that he had been told that it was his right to fill up the vacancy; and lastly, that as he had promised the situation to Mr. Howel, he could not in honour retract. At the same time he took Howe aside, and began to question him more closely about Dr. Ward. Howe 'assured him that it would be much for his honour' to befriend the doctor. Cromwell, turning to Dr. Ward, told him that he found 'Mr. Howe to be very much his friend, and was, on such recom-

mendation, disposed to give him some tokens of his regard.' He then 'pleasantly asked him, what he thought the principalship of Jesus College might be worth?' The doctor told him what it was generally *computed* to be worth. Upon this, the Protector promised that he would allow him an annual sum to that amount."

Howe was held in high esteem by the Episcopalians generally, and from his position was able to render material services to not a few of them. It is related that, at the time when the tribunal known as the "triers" was constituted, whose duty was to "ascertain the qualifications of all candidates for the ministerial office," among other Episcopalians (whose fears of the ordeal, it may well be believed, were not ill-grounded) who sought advice from Howe was Dr. Thomas Fuller. He addressed Howe in the humorous vein for which he was noted, saying: "You may observe, Sir, that I am a somewhat corpulent man, and I am to go through a very strait passage, I beg you would be so good as to give me a shove, and help me through." After receiving Howe's counsel, he appeared before the examiners, and in reply to their usual question framed to elicit whether the candidate had ever had any experience of a work of grace upon his heart, Fuller, instead of attempting an answer "so particular as to involve any of those perplexing discussions which were the delight of the men and of the age," said that "he could appeal to the Searcher of hearts, that he made a conscience of his very thoughts." Calamy tells us that with this answer the "triers" were satisfied, as indeed they might well be, and Fuller passed the dread ordeal.

The divisions among the various religious parties at this time occupied much of Howe's thoughts; and he was always more or less occupied with schemes of reunion and comprehension. This his large and catholic spirit earnestly desired, as his letters to Baxter amply testify. He was anxious to enlist Cromwell's active co-operation and induce him "to invite by some public declaration, the godly ministers of the several counties and of several parties, to the work of associating upon such common principles as might be found tending to general good, and not cross to the private opinions of the several parties."

Before Howe submitted his proposals to Cromwell he writes asking Baxter's opinion: "Whether it may not be a more hopeful course to attempt first the reconciling only of the two

middle parties, Presbyterian and Congregational? inasmuch as the extreme parties would be so much startled at the mention of a union with one another (as Anabaptists with Episcopalians, yea, or with Presbyterians) that it might possibly blast the design in its very beginning; but if those two other parties could be brought together first, endeavours might afterward be used for drawing in the rest (probably with more success); and therefore whether accordingly it were not best to present to his Highness only what might serve that end?" The suggestion embodied in these words admirably illustrates Howe's caution and discretion, as well as the intense sincerity of his desire for the reunion and welfare of the Christian Church. The comment of Rogers upon the suggested scheme for comprehension is essentially true and just. "Such an union as that for which Baxter and Howe panted awaits the gradual growth of a more expansive spirit of charity throughout the Christian Church; it must be the *effect* of love, but cannot *precede* it. In the time of the Commonwealth the animosities between religious parties were evidently far too strong to admit any hope of attaining this object; nor is the period yet arrived at which any such sublime theory can be realized."

Already we have seen indications that Howe felt the atmosphere of Cromwell's household to be uncongenial to him, and there are not lacking still stronger signs that the young divine was impatient with what he esteemed a general lack of precision and regularity of definite religious exercises. He did not estimate at their true value the public actions of Cromwell, nor see them in their true light as the service of man and sincere worship of God. It was but a certain immaturity in Howe which allowed his preconceptions of the religious life to blind him to the genuinely spiritual aims of the Protector and to sigh for a sphere of labour less repugnant.

That he was becoming restless in his position at Whitehall is evident from the following: "My time will not serve me long;" he writes, "for I think I shall be constrained in conscience (all things considered) to return, ere long to my former station. I left it, I think, upon very fair terms. For first, when I settled there, I expressly reserved to myself a liberty of removing, if the providence of God should invite me to a condition of more serviceableness anywhere else, which liberty I reckon I could not have parted with if I

would, unless I could have exempted myself from God's dominion. My call hither, was a work I thought very considerable; the setting up of the worship and discipline of Christ in this family, where I was to have joined with another called upon the same account. I had made as I suppose, a competent provision for the place I left. But now at once I see the designed work here hopelessly laid aside. We affect here to live in so loose a way, that a man cannot fix upon any certain charge to carry towards them as a minister of Christ should: so that it were as hopeful a course to preach in a market, or in any assembly met by chance, as here. In the meantime, the people I left are breaking into parties; cannot meet in any one person as they profess they could in me; and are now wholly destitute; and, having heard of some inclinations on my part towards them, invite my return. I cannot meet with any argument against it, except fleshly ones, which I hope God will help me to slight." In a postscript to the letter from which the above extract is taken, Howe says: "The affected disorderliness of this family as to the matters of God's worship (whence arises any despair of doing good here) I desire as much as is possible to conceal. . . . I desire you to be very sparing in making it known as 'tis here represented."

Baxter, from whom Howe sought advice at this critical juncture of his life, attempted to dissuade Howe from the course projected, believing that "there was no one else who was likely to fill the same arduous post, with an equal measure of integrity and discretion, or with such a conscientious regard to the public good." Howe's humility and modesty would not permit him to endorse Baxter's opinion, for he writes to his friend at Kidderminster in the following strain: "Here, my influence is not like to be much, (as it is not to be expected a raw young man should be much considerable among grandees); my work little; my success hitherto little; my hopes considering the temper of this place, very small; especially coupling it with the temper of my spirit, which, did you know it, alone would, I think, greatly alter your judgement of this case. I am naturally bashful, pusillanimous, easily brow-beaten, solicitous about the fitness and unfitness of speech or silence in most cases, afraid (especially having to do with those who are constant in the *arcana imperii*) of being accounted uncivil, etc., and the distemper being natural (most intrinsically) is less

curable. You can easily guess how little considerations are like to do in such a case. I did not, I confess, know myself so well as, since my coming up, occasion and reflection have taught me to do. I find now my hopes of doing good, will be among people where I shall not be so liable to be overawed. I might have known this sooner, and have prevented the trouble I am now in."

Howe's position had become thoroughly distasteful to him, but despite increasing difficulties, and influenced, no doubt, by the counsel of Baxter, he still continued to discharge the duties of his office. Rogers justly comments on "the uncommon prudence" with which Howe conducted himself in this difficult situation; while Calamy pays Howe the following high tribute: "Never can I find him so much as charged, even by those who have been most forward to inveigh against a number of his contemporaries, with improving his interest in those who then had the management of affairs in their hands, either to the enriching himself, or the doing ill offices to others, though of known differing sentiments. He readily embraced every occasion that offered, of serving the interest of religion and learning, and opposing the errors and designs which at that time threatened both."

It was Howe's stainless integrity, his unquestioned sincerity and invariable high-mindedness, together with his intellectual and spiritual attainments, which accounted for that personal influence he was able to exert with Cromwell, an influence so considerable that Baxter urged it ought not lightly to be thrown away. It is pleasant to record that on one occasion the Protector was moved to say to his chaplain: "You have obtained many favours for others; I wonder when the time is to come that you will solicit anything for yourself, or your family." It is believed that before the end, however, he incurred Cromwell's displeasure by preaching against certain fanatical notions associated with "a particular faith in prayer" which prevailed at the Protector's court, notions shared, it would appear, by Cromwell himself. Preaching from the text, *The prayer of faith shall save the sick*, Howe exposed the fallacies underlying the prevalent notion and the pernicious consequences of all such dangerous illusions. During the discourse Cromwell shewed both marked attention and displeasure, and when Howe descended the pulpit, a courtier present, after asking him "whether he

knew what he had done?" assured him that he had lost for ever the Protector's favour. Howe's reply was to the effect that, having discharged what he considered his duty, he was well content to leave the issue with God. Afterwards, in conversation with Calamy, Howe remarked that "he observed that Cromwell was cooler in his carriage to him than before, and sometimes seemed as if he would have spoken to him on the subject, but that he never did"; and, says Calamy, "he added that he had a great deal of satisfaction in what he did in this case, both in the time of doing it, and ever afterwards, to the time of our conversing together upon this subject."

In addition to his duties in the Protector's household Howe appears to have officiated on several occasions, if not regularly, at St. Margaret's, Westminster (according to Wood, Howe was lecturer there), and to have preached, at least one sermon before Parliament. In an advertisement of this sermon Howe is described as "preacher at Westminster"; the title of the sermon was *Man's Duty in Magnifying God's Work*.

On September 3rd, 1658, Cromwell died, but Howe did not immediately leave Whitehall. Possibly, as Rogers suggests, the personal character of the new Protector had a considerable share in reconciling him to his office. Certainly Howe, to the end of his life, never ceased to hold Richard Cromwell in affectionate regard.

Howe was present at the deliberations of the Savoy Conference of "the Congregational brethren," which met in October, 1658, when the revised version of the Westminster Confession, known as the "Savoy Confession," was drawn up; and although Howe (to quote Dr. Horton) "had begun his ministry as a Presbyterian, and never avowedly changed his denomination," it is certain "he would approve of these modifications in the direction of Congregationalism." "I would not be willing," said Cromwell on one occasion, "to see the day when England shall be in the power of the Presbyterian to impose upon the consciences of others that profess faith with Christ." Howe would have re-echoed at least this sentiment of the Protector.

Richard Cromwell occupied for a few months only the place of his father. He was quite unequal for the mighty task, and his deposition was inevitable. Howe's letter to Baxter, following immediately the event, and preceding the darker days ahead, is full of significance. The letter is long,

but as it sums up the situation at the hour it is here given *in extenso* :

REV. AND DEAR BROTHER,

"Since my return from the West, (where I suppose you may have heard I spent some months of late,) I have often been putting pen to paper to write to you ; but have deferred,—being still held in expectation of some further issue,—that I might know what to write that might be a ground of some action or treaty for the church's good. Such expectations are now at an end. I know not to what purpose it will now be to fill a letter with complaints of man's iniquity, and our present and approaching miseries. My kinsman, Mr. Upton, (now in town,) showed me a letter of yours, wherein you express your wonder at our late turns, as well you may. He hath made it my task to give what account I can. It cannot be new to you that the council in the old Protector's time was divided into two parties ; the one was for a settlement on such terms as might please the nation, as he himself also was ; those, except one of late, had no present relation to the army ; the other, who were (the chief of them) army-men, were not much pleased with, nor did study any such thing ; but thought it their duty, in order to the safety of religion and liberty of conscience, to keep up the power of the army as much as they could, and thereby to curb and repress the spirit of the nation, as they use to phrase it. The young Protector—following (in this) his father's steps, I mean in the study and endeavour of a civil settlement, whereby a just provision might be made also for religious liberty by a law, without having the nation under a force, and that things might run in their natural channel—is looked upon with a jealous eye by the military part of the council ; lest he should mingle interests with the nation, and master theirs, and so the army, wherein their *places* of power and profit lay, by degrees become insignificant. To obviate this, after his entrance into the government, they attempt to vote the army independent of him, etc. A parliament being called, they find his interests to be prevailing there against the Commonwealth's-men, (as they are called,) so that the *other* house is owned and agreed to be transacted with. They find that this other house will be no balance to the Commons, as being much of their temper ; for though it be true the old Protector called several swordsmen into that house to please the army, yet he wisely contrived it, that they should not be so many as to hurt the nation ; the judges and several gentlemen of the country, and quite of another temper, being the major part ; and easily perceive that whatever shall be done by the Commons, in order to the restraining of religious liberty, and the subjugating of the army to the civil government, is likely to meet with no great opposition in the other house. Therefore they (the army) think it necessary to have the Parliament *gospelled* or dissolved ; and because they cannot procure this by persuasion, they embody and resolve upon force ; which the Protector perceiving, and understanding, if the work must be done by them, they intended only *gospelling*, and to leave a remnant that should do their work, and put a pretext of legality upon whatever they should have a mind to ; for prevention of this,

choosing rather to dissolve them, not dreaming, as one would think no man could, of such a thing as this rag of —, etc. This action of the army, which procured the Parliament's dissolution, occasioned a mighty accession and confluence to them of wild-headed persons of all sorts, whom they refuse not, as fearing they might have need of them; these infuse into the inferior officers a disaffection to government by a single person; the stream runs so strong this way, that the chief officers, cannot withstand it; and they *endeavour* faintly enough, some of them at least; hence rather than undertake the modelling of a new government, they think it advisable rather to work the nation with the price of the

"Sir, such persons as are now at the head of affairs, will blast religion, if God prevent not. The design you writ me of, some time since, to introduce Infidelity or Popery, they have opportunity enough to effect. I know some leading men are not *Christians*. *Religion is lost out of England, farther than as it can creep into corners*. Those in power who are friends to it, will no more suspect these persons, than their own selves. I am returning to my old station, being now at liberty beyond dispute."

I am, sir, Your much obliged,

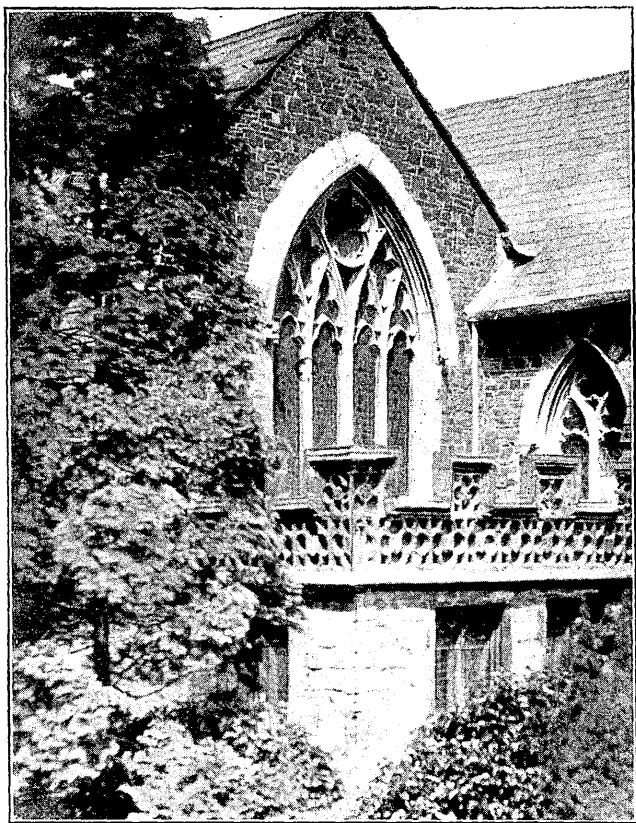
"May 21."

"JOHN HOWE."

Thus Howe on the deposition of Richard Cromwell was now free again to attend to "the necessitous condition" of his flock at Torrington, whither he immediately repaired.

non-conciliatory spirit of the party then in the ascendant ; and while the issues in the balance were inconceivably grave, the decision was made by men so blindly partisan that they had but contempt for any form of faith except their own. In the event, "the English people fall into two sharply opposed religious camps." No other result was possible ; for the Act of Uniformity was so framed, as Sheldon himself admitted, "to compel the Presbyterians to become nonconformists or knaves." By this act all clergymen, all residents in the Universities, all school masters and private tutors were compelled to profess their "unfeigned assent and consent" to all and everything contained in the Book of Common Prayer ; they were required to renounce the Solemn League and Covenant, and to pledge themselves to the doctrine of passive obedience. As Dr. Horton puts it : "This unprincipled Act of Parliament, the outcome of Restoration morality and intolerance, actually required all the clergy in England to pledge themselves to an impossibility, an absurdity, an insincerity. It is necessary to recognise that English Nonconformity, historically considered, has its origin in the self-sacrificing repudiation of this iniquity in high places."

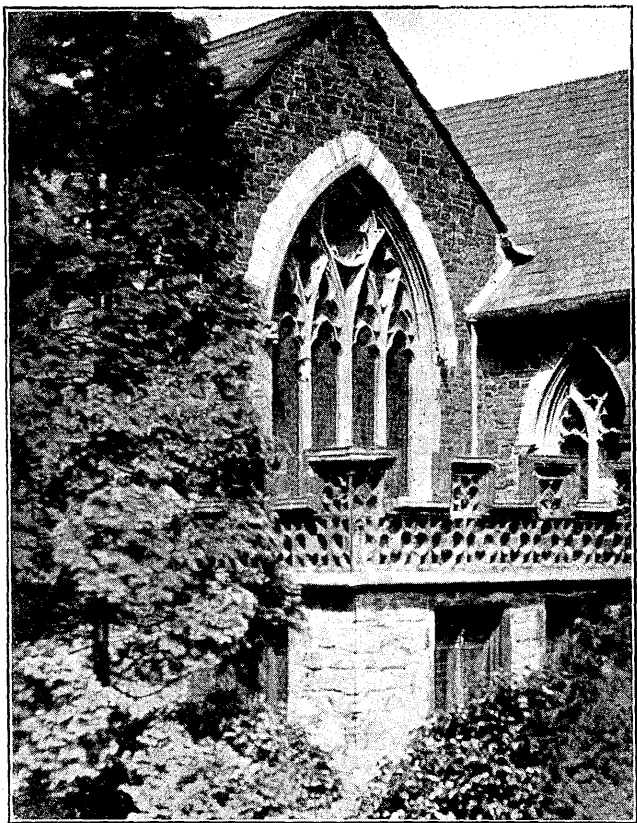
Howe's decision was never for one moment in doubt, and on the day when the Act took effect Howe took a pathetic farewell of his parish ; telling his people that "he had consulted his conscience, and could not be satisfied with the terms of conformity fixed by law," he concluded by giving the principal reasons of his refusal to subscribe. "With all his catholicity of spirit," says Rogers, "and his magnanimous disregard of minor differences ; with all his disposition ever to forget many of those differences for the sake of unity and peace, and to comply with the practices of various parties (so long as it was mutually admitted, that such compliance was a compliance of charity only), he could not prevail on himself to conform, though never questioning that multitudes honestly could. He felt that it was one thing to admit that certain propositions might be embraced or rejected according to each man's opinion respecting them, and another solemnly to subscribe that he believed *that* to be true (however trivial in itself) which he nevertheless believed to be false ; one thing to declare a certain practice of no importance, and another to renounce that liberty of adopting it or not, which ought to be the very consequence of its alleged insignificance."



JOHN HOWE'S VESTRY

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JOHN HOWE'S VESTRY

Howe had indeed conscientious scruples with regard to many of the terms of the Act, but in addition to these his truly catholic mind objected to any ecclesiastical system based upon so restricted a basis. Superior to minor differences himself, he could not share the prejudices which magnified their importance; believing many opinions and practices indifferent in themselves, he could not identify himself with those who treated them as essentials. So earnestly did he desire the visible communion of all Christian men, whatever their particular beliefs might be, that he would be no party to the limiting of church fellowship by some of the least significant matters rigidly enjoined by the Act of Uniformity. It is therefore probable that on these grounds, as Rogers suggests, even if the Act had not demanded subscription to propositions to which he could not give his "unfeigned assent and consent," he would still have hesitated to conform.

The 2,000 ejected ministers justified their nonconformity on widely different grounds; it is therefore the more interesting to know and understand the precise points which presented themselves as insuperable obstacles to a man of Howe's liberal mind. The two sermons which Howe preached on the day of his ejection have not survived, but long afterwards in his tract on *Occasional Conformity* Howe perhaps sums up what he felt on that memorable occasion. If it be asked: "Should not the latitude of a Christian carry him to fix his communion with the larger and more extensive Church?" the reply is clear: "What! should the latitude of a Christian bind him to one sort of Christians, with exclusion of all other? Never was that noble principle of Christian latitude more perverted or turned even against itself, than if it be used to train men into a religious bigotry. . . . They that refuse confinement to the largest Church may avoid it, not because they should otherwise express too much latitude, but too little." Howe felt that the Act of Uniformity had changed the Established Church into a sect, by proclaiming episcopacy to be the essential and divine form of the Church of Christ.

From Howe's conversation with his broad-minded friend, Dr. Wilkins (afterwards Bishop of Chester), we gather still more clearly the considerations which moved Howe to refuse to subscribe. During this conversation (an account of which Calamy had from Howe's own lips) Dr. Wilkins remarked

that the "Act of Uniformity had had such consequences as a little surprised him ; in that while some, that he should have thought much too stiff and rigid ever to have fallen in with the Establishment, had complied and conformed ; others, that he thought had a sufficient *latitude* to have conformed, had stood out, and continued Nonconformists," hinting to Howe that "he took *him* for one of the latter sort, and should be glad to know the reasons of his conduct." Howe replied that "he had weighed the matter with all the impartiality he was able ; that he had not so slender a concern for his own usefulness and comfort, as not to have been willing and desirous to have been under the Establishment, could he but have compassed it with satisfaction to his conscience ; that to give a particular account of all the reasons of his conduct (which he was free to do without any reserve, when a convenient opportunity offered) would take up much more time than they had to spend together ; that so many things were necessarily to be touched upon in a discourse on that subject, that it was not possible for it to be crowded into a transient conversation ; and therefore he should reserve it to a season when, having more time, he might have more scope. *But one thing he could tell him with assurance*—that that *latitude* of his, which he (Dr. Wilkins) was pleased to take notice of, was so far from inducing him to conformity, that it was the very thing that made and kept him a Nonconformist."

Wilkins then questioned Howe, whether it was the discipline of the Church to which he chiefly objected, and Howe replied that "he could not by any means be fond of a church, that in reality had no discipline at all, and that he thought *that* a very considerable objection against the Establishment." On hearing this, the doctor said that "though he was sensible there was no time for lengthened discourse on the subject, he should be glad of some general mention of his principal objections. Howe then went on to say that "he could not recognise, in the present constitution, those noble and generous principles of *communion*, which he thought must, sooner or later, characterize every Church of Christ ; that consequently, when that flourishing state of religion should arrive, which he thought he had sufficient warrant from the Word of God to expect, a constitution which rested on such an exclusive basis must fall ; that believing this to be the case, he was no more willing to exercise his ministry under such a system, than he would be to dwell in a house built on an

insecure foundation." In conclusion, Dr. Wilkins made the following reply to Howe: "I understand you well, and if that be your sense take this advice from a friend; don't think to gain anything by sneaking or crouching, but bear up against us boldly and bravely; stand to your principle, and sooner or later, you may hope to carry your point."

No man ever stood more boldly and bravely to his principle than John Howe, and nothing could have been more truly admirable than the manner in which he demeaned himself at this painful crisis of his life. Howe had an ardent passion for comprehension and unity, and to be compelled by conscience to dissent from his fellow Christians was to him a grievous thing. "It was," Dr. Horton remarks, "no pleasure to him to differ. He had, personally, nothing to gain and everything to lose by the step he was taking. The ground of his decision was so fine, and so delicate, that no one at the time, and few since, could adequately appreciate it. The tragedy of the situation was precisely this, that the action which cost him so much must appear to even good men unnecessary and arbitrary." It is perhaps idle now to inquire too closely into the motives of those who framed the Act of Uniformity, but the primary motives of some at least are apparent. When one of the nobles remarked to the king that he was afraid the terms of uniformity were so rigid that many ministers would not accept them, Sheldon replied: "I am afraid they will." His fears were groundless; and with the 2,000 noble confessors John Howe sacrificed and suffered. With his wife and family he went forth from the happy and beneficent life at Torrington for the sake of conscience and principle held more sacred than life. "His flock," says Calamy, "were all in tears."

Howe was no longer a "settled" minister, but he was not a silent one, for he continued to preach as opportunities presented themselves in the private houses of many of his friends in Devonshire. As the Nonconformists were pursued with unrelenting bitterness, Howe's conduct did not for long escape attention. After preaching in the house of a friend with whom he had been staying for a few days, an officer from the court of the Bishop of Exeter was sent to apprehend him. Failing to find him, citations were immediately issued against both Howe and his friend. Without delay Howe rode to Exeter, and having alighted at his inn he was greeted by "a certain dignified clergyman, with whom he

was well acquainted," who asked him "what he did there?" On Howe replying characteristically: "Pray, Sir, what have I done that I may *not* be here?" he was informed that a process was out against him. His friend then inquired if he would wait upon the bishop, but Howe made answer that he had no intention of doing so, unless the bishop, *hearing* of his being in the city, should invite him. Acting upon the suggestion, his friend acquainted the bishop, Dr. Seth Ward (who had been befriended by Howe at court only a few years previously), of Howe's presence, and he was received at the episcopal palace with much kindness. Asking Howe the reasons for his Nonconformity, the ejected minister replied that to give a reasonable account of his objections which should do justice to them would make great demands on his lordship's patience, but when pressed to mention any one of the points which weighed with him, Howe mentioned the difficulty of re-ordination. "Pray, sir," said the bishop, what *hurt* is there in being twice ordained?" "*Hurt*, my lord? it *hurts* my understanding; the thought is shocking; it is an absurdity; since nothing can have two beginnings. I am sure I am a minister of Christ, and am ready to debate that matter with your lordship, if your lordship pleases; but I cannot begin again to be a minister." Howe was dismissed in the friendliest manner, and with the assurance that if he would conform, considerable preferment might fall to his lot. Howe departed and nothing more was heard of the process.

The year following, Parliament assembled at Oxford, having left London to escape the plague, and proceeded at once to devise further means of harrying the Nonconformists. They passed the Five Mile Act which compelled Nonconformist ministers to swear that it was not lawful to take arms against the king under any pretence whatsoever; "that they abhorred the traitorous position of taking arms by his authority against his person, or against those commissioned by him, in pursuance of such commission; and that they would not at any time endeavour any alteration of the government, either in Church or State." Those who should refuse to take this oath were forbidden "except on the high road, to come within five miles of any city or corporation, or any place that sent burgesses to parliament, or any place where they had been ministers, or had preached, since the Act of Oblivion."

Naturally, there was considerable division of opinion

among the Nonconformist ministers concerning the fitness of taking such an oath. Ultimately, Dr. Bates and twenty other ministers in London took it, and Howe with twelve others in Devonshire took his oath at the county sessions. Rogers states that "the principal thing which satisfied those of the Nonconformist ministers who took the oath was the declaration of the Lord Keeper Bridgman, that by *endeavours* to change the government was meant *unlawful endeavours*. The pressure of the Act was so severe, that its victims were naturally glad to avail themselves of any honourable method of gaining exemption from the severe penalties attached to a refusal to take the oath." The ideal of English Nonconformity has always been a supremely spiritual one. Howe had some doubts concerning the oath, but a declaration was made by one of those appearing in court with him "which prevented all possibility of pretence" that it had been evasively dealt with. "Understanding," the declaration ran, "partly by discourse about it with some who concurred in making of the law, and partly by consideration of the law itself, and other laws, that the oath hath no other meaning or end, than to secure the person of the king's majesty, and his authority, whether in his person or commissioners, and the government in Church and State, from being shaken or subverted, by any unpeaceable or seditious endeavours, out of our place and calling, I am abundantly satisfied to tender myself to this honourable court, for the taking of it."

About this time Howe's father-in-law, George Hughes, and his brother-in-law, Obadiah Hughes, were imprisoned in the Isle of St. Nicholas, and Calamy records a rumour of Howe suffering a two months' imprisonment in the same place, but adds that he possessed no knowledge of "the occasion of this imprisonment, or of what was alleged to justify it, or in what way Howe obtained deliverance." There is evidence in the shape of a letter written by Howe to Obadiah Hughes at this time, that he was passing through a season of great trial, but there is no suggestion that he had suffered imprisonment. However, imprisonment was by no means the sorest affliction of an ejected minister. To go forth from his home with wife and children as vagrants upon the face of the earth, with little or no means of subsistence—this was the severest trial of hundreds of these conscientious ministers; and for several years such was the lot of John

Howe. "Many," wrote Howe, "live upon charity; some of them with difficulty getting, and others (educated to modesty) *with greater difficulty* begging, their bread."

In 1668 Howe published his book entitled *The Blessedness of the Righteous*, which enjoyed a considerable popularity. It consisted of the substance of sermons preached during his ministry at Torrington. He stated in his preface to the work that he was not at all solicitous that the world should know the history of the conception of the treatise, nor was he concerned to have it known what were the inducements to the publication of it; but it may be surmised that the necessitous circumstances of his family suggested the publication of what Baxter (in a friendly introduction to the volume) called "so edifying a treatise."

CHAPTER IV

Antrim

THE publication of *The Blessedness of the Righteous* won for Howe, not only reputation, but the valued friendship of Lord Massarene, of Antrim Castle, Ireland, who invited Howe to become his domestic chaplain. Howe's patron (the second Lord Massarene) was originally Sir John Skeffington, of Fisherwick, Staffordshire, who, marrying the daughter, had received the title of Lord Massarene of Antrim. The first Lord Massarene, originally Sir John Clotworthy, had received his title as a reward for services rendered in connection with the restoration of Charles II.

Howe gladly accepted the generous offer of Lord Massarene, and early in 1671 left Torrington, accompanied by his son George ; it was arranged that his wife and the rest of his family should follow later. On the journey Howe with other travellers was detained over Sunday at the Welsh port, probably Holyhead, the wind being unfavourable, and he was invited to preach in the parish church. The clergyman of the place was "only accustomed to read prayers," and the congregation listened to the powerful sermon of Howe with such interest and appreciation that on the following Sunday morning a very great crowd assembled hoping to hear again the preacher who had so wonderfully impressed them. The clergyman of the parish, "totally unprovided himself to meet the exigency," sent his clerk urgently to implore Howe's presence and help, and saying that "if he would not come he knew not what to do, for that the county had come in from several miles round in the hope of hearing him." Howe was ill in bed with a feverish cold, and at first doubted whether he could respond to this strange and unexpected summons ; "but reflecting that he knew not how much good might be

done by his efforts, amongst a people who seemed eager to hear the word of God in proportion to the rarity of their opportunities of hearing it, he resolved to risk it. He afterwards declared that he had seldom preached with more fervour and energy, and never saw a congregation more attentive or devout." "If my ministry," he said, "was ever of any use, I think it must be then."

A few days afterwards Howe sailed for Ireland, and at Antrim Castle he spent probably the most fruitful and happiest years of his life. "Under the protection of a powerful patron, and in the enjoyment of a competent income, he quietly pursued his two most cherished employments, the ministry of the gospel and the study of divinity." This season of retirement and quiet was of the greatest possible value to Howe; his spiritual insight was sharpened, and the life of God in his soul deepened during long hours of prayer, meditation and study amid "the deep solitude and the romantic beauty of the scenes in which he now dwelt."

Antrim Castle "is among the few found to be preserved in Ireland of those erected in pursuance of the injunctions of the grant made by James I., for the protection of the colonies or plantations then about to be established. The building was raised, as appears by an inscription on a large carved mantel of stone, covering the centre of the principal front, in the year 1613, by Sir Hugh Clotworthy, and has been subsequently altered, according to the different tastes of its successive proprietors. . . . Few places in Ireland command greater power of beauty or extent of drive. Its demesne and deer park stretch along the shore of Lough Neagh for about two miles, ornamented with fine old timber and copse wood, covering every headland down to the water's edge, with various plantations, calculated to blend in the scenery of as rich and highly cultivated a country as any to be found in Ireland. The view over the lake towards the south is bounded only by the horizon, while towards the west it rests on the distant Tyrone and Derry Mountains, and the nearer woods of Shane's Castle, the ancient seat of Earl O'Neill, whose towers project into the lake itself."

Here, in these calm and congenial surroundings, Howe rewrote and published his discourse on *The Vanity of Man as Mortal* and his volume of fine sermons entitled *Delighting in God*. In addition to these he wrote two books which were not given to the world until some years later; a minor work,

The Reconcilableness of God's Prescience of the Sins of Men with the Wisdom and Sincerity of His Counsels, etc., and the first part of his great work *The Living Temple*.

The Vanity of Man as Mortal was published in 1671, and the dedicatory epistle which is dated from Antrim, April 12th, 1671, "serves to determine some few points respecting the time and circumstances of Howe's removal to Ireland." We gather from this letter that he had been in London for a short time previous to his acceptance of Lord Massarene's invitation, and that when he wrote the letter he had been in residence at Antrim Castle for some few weeks.

The Vanity of Man as Mortal was written on the occasion of the death of Anthony, son of John Upton, of Lupton, Devon, a relative of the author. "This son had been absent in Spain for more than 20 years, and had at length, at the earnest entreaties of his friends, consented to return home. His family having received intimation of the probable period of his arrival, it was arranged that there should be a meeting of his brothers and sisters, and all his other near relations, at his father's house, to celebrate the joyous occasion of his return. They assembled accordingly; but what was their consternation, when the vessel which was to have brought their long lost friend, brought him in his shroud. It appears that, immediately after he had made arrangements for embarkation, he had been attacked with some violent disease, which in a few days terminated his life; so that the first notice his friends had of this sad event (to use the language of Howe in his dedicatory epistle), 'was the arrival of that vessel clad in mourning attire, which, according to his own desire in his sickness, brought over the deserted body to its native place.' The family, who had arranged their meeting under such far happier auspices, instead of assembling, as they had expected, to greet him after his long absence from his country, met only to 'celebrate the mournful solemnity of his interment.'"

The theme of the treatise is "a fine argument from the idea of God to the assurance of a future life"; and incidentally Howe gives a fine and forcible description of the levity, infidelity and sensuality which characterized the times of Charles II. He writes: "If he that, amidst the hazards of a dubious war, betrays the interest and honour of his country, be justly infamous, and thought worthy severest punishment, I see not why a debauched sensualist, that lives as if he were created only to indulge his appetite; that so vilifies the notion of

man, as if he were made but to eat, and drink and sport, to please only his sense of fancy ; that in this time and state of conflict between the powers of this present world, and those of the world to come, quits his party, bids open defiance to humanity, abjures the noble principles and ends, forsakes the laws and society of all that are worthy to be esteemed men, abandons the common and rational hope of mankind concerning a future immortality ; and herds himself among brute creatures ; I say, I see not why such a one should not be scorned and abhorred as a traitor to the whole race and nation of reasonable creatures, as a fugitive from the tents and deserter of the common interest of men ; and that, both for the vileness of his practice and the danger of his example. . . . One would think whosoever have remaining in them any conscience of obligation and duty to the common parent and author of our beings, any remembrance of our divine original, any breathings of our ancient hope, any sense of human honour, any resentments of so vile an indignity to the nature of man, any spark of a just and generous indignation for so opprobrious a contumely to their own kind and order in the creation, should oppose themselves with an heroic vigour to this treacherous and unnatural combination. And let us, my worthy friends, be provoked, in our several capacities, to do our part herein ; and, at least, so to live and converse in this world, that the course and tenour of our lives may import an open asserting of our hopes in another ; and may let men see we are not ashamed to own the belief of a life to come. Let us, by a patient continuance in well doing (how low designs soever others content themselves to pursue), seek honour, glory and immortality to ourselves ; and by our avowed, warrantable ambition in this pursuit, justify our great and bountiful Creator, who hath made us not in vain, but for so high and great things ; and glorify our blessed Redeemer, who, amidst the gloomy and disconsolate darkness of this wretched world, when it was overspread with the shadow of death, hath brought life and immortality to light in the gospel. Let us labour both to feel and express the power of that religion which hath the inchoation of the participated divine life for its principle, and the perfection and eternal perpetuation thereof for its scope and end."

Howe's volume of sermons *Delighting in God* was published in 1674, and in a prefatory letter to his old parishioners at Torrington, he writes :

"Great reason I have to repent, that I have not with greater earnestness pressed upon you the known and important things wherein serious Christians do generally agree. But I repent not I have been so little engaged in the hot contests of our age, about the things wherein they differ. For, as I pretend to little light in these things: (whence I could not have much confidence to fortify me unto such an undertaking;) so I must profess to have little inclination to contend about matters of that kind. Nor yet am I indifferent as to those smaller things, that I cannot discern to be in their own nature so. But though I cannot avoid to think that course right which I have deliberately chosen therein, I do yet esteem that but a small thing upon which to ground an opinion of my excelling them that think otherwise, as if I knew more than they. For I have often recounted thus seriously with myself: that of every differing party in those circumstantial matters, I do particularly know some persons by whom I find myself much excelled in far greater things than is the matter of that difference. I cannot, it is true, thereupon say and think everything that they do; which is impossible, since they differ from one another as well as me. And I understand well, there are other measures of truth than this or that excellent person's opinion. But I thereupon reckon I have little reason to be conceited of any advantage I have of such in point of knowledge, (even as little as he should have, that can sing or play well on a lute, of him that knows how to command armies or govern a kingdom,) and can with less confidence differ from them, or contend with them; being thereby, though I cannot find I err in these matters, constrained to have some suspicion lest I do; and to admit it possible enough that some of them who differ from me, having much more light in greater matters, may have so in these also. Besides, that I most seriously think humility, charity and patience, would more contribute to the composing of these lesser differences, or to the good estate of the Christian interest under them, than the most fervent disputes and contestations."

The whole volume is marked by this simplicity and spirituality of mind, united with a breadth of thought and charity which is singularly attractive. Howe's great concern was for those great cardinal truths on which all Christians are agreed, and although too sincere to ignore differences, or to treat them as matters of no importance at all (which is

often the affectation of our unintelligent charity), he will not suffer them to usurp the primary place.

The first part of Howe's greatest and best known work, *The Living Temple*, was not published until 1676, but it was prepared for the press during his residence at Antrim. The intention of the complete work was "a designed improvement of that notion, that a good man is the Temple of God." It was, as Rogers says, "a system of theology, an exposition of all the great principles of religion, both natural and revealed." The controversial genius of the time was rapidly assuming the spirit of philosophic scepticism, and soon boldly questioned "all the fundamental principles both of ethics and theology." The first part of *The Living Temple* (dedicated to Lord Massarene) consists of "an elaborate demonstration of the existence and perfections of God, and of His conversableness with men," and, as Dr. Horton says, "presents Howe in the maturity of his mental powers." The second part of this work was not published until he was nearing the end of his life.

During his stay in Antrim, Howe preached frequently in the Presbyterian meeting-house in Cooke Street, and was an honoured member of the Friday conference, known as the Antrim meeting, a meeting which finally developed into the Presbyterian Organisation of the North of Ireland. "Nothing," says Rogers, "can more strongly evince the rare conjunction of excellence that must have met in Howe: his catholic temper, his consummate prudence, his unaffected modesty, his insinuating manners, than the fact, quite unprecedented, that the Bishop of the diocese, in concurrence with the wishes of his Metropolitan, permitted him, without any demand of conformity, to preach at Antrim church every week. The Archbishop is even reported publicly to have told his clergy, that he could wish every pulpit in his province to be open to the distinguished Nonconformist."

In addition to his literary work and his preaching, in 1675 Howe assisted Thomas Gowan in founding a training school for Presbyterian ministers, an undertaking in which his ripe wisdom, sound learning, and profound piety must have proved invaluable.

These quiet and fruitful labours, however, were interrupted, towards the end of the year 1675, by an invitation to succeed Dr. Lazarus Seaman—the learned and influential Presbyterian who ministered to the congregation meeting in

Haberdashers' Hall, Wood Street, Cheapside. Four sermons preached by Howe in London during the spring of that year had probably attracted the notice of some of the members of Dr. Seaman's congregation, who felt at once that, in the harassed and varying fortunes of Nonconformists under the *régime* of Charles II., Howe would prove a wise, able and inspiring leader. Thus, although a section of the congregation desired the accomplished Stephen Charnock as their pastor, after the death of Dr. Seaman on September 9th, 1675, a call was sent to Howe in Antrim. Unable to make a decision on so grave a matter without a complete knowledge of all the attendant circumstances, Howe resolved to visit London again.

He did not embark on this enterprise lightly, as may be gathered from a paper written by him, by night, on his bed, December 20th, 1675, and entitled *Considerations and Communings with Myself Concerning my Present Journey*. He puts to himself the question: "Have I not an undue design or self-respect in it?" and answers: "I have insisted on this chiefly in prayer to God, in reference to this business, ever since it was set on foot, that I might be sincere in it; and though I have earnestly begged light to guide me therein, so as that I might do that herein which in the substance of the thing is agreeable to the holy will of God, yet I have much more importunately prayed that I might be sincere in what I do; not only because I know God will pardon ignorance (unremedied by utmost endeavours) where He beholds sincerity, whereas He will never accept the knowledge of our duty, nor the doing what is in substance our duty, if that right manner of doing it, or principle where it is done, be wanting; but, also, from the higher esteem I have of sincerity, above all light and knowledge without it, and the greater excellence of the thing itself. I have carefully examined what selfish respects I can have in this matter. Is it worldly emolument? In this my heart acquits me in the sight of God. Is it that I affect to be upon a public stage, to be popular and applauded by men? To this I say, (1) That I do verily believe, that I shall be lower in the eye and esteem of the people in London, when I come under their nearer view. I know myself incapable of pleasing their genius, I cannot contrive nor endure to preach with elaborate artifice. They will soon be weary when they hear nothing but plain discourses of such matters as are not new to them. Yea, and ministers, that

now judge of me by what I have written (when matter and words were in some measure weighed), will find me, when I converse with them, slow to apprehend things, slow to express my own apprehensions, unready, entangled, and obscure in my apprehensions and expressions; so that all will soon say, 'This is not the man we took him for.' (2) It displeases me not, that they should find and say this. I hope I should digest it well." There are other searching questions and similar answers which leave the reader in no doubt as to the sincerity and spirituality of Howe's purpose. In the result Howe was established as pastor of the congregation meeting in Silver Street, while Charnock ministered to the congregation in Crosby Hall.

CHAPTER V

A London Ministry

IT is unfortunate that we possess no full and exact information regarding the congregation in Silver Street to which Howe was now called to minister. The building in which they worshipped has long since disappeared, and its site is uncertain. "The worshippers," says Dr. Horton, "must have been mainly prosperous city men, who inherited the strong Puritan traditions. There were also a few professional men like Dr. Henry Sampson, 'a noted physician in the City of London.' He was for thirty years a member of the church, and on leaving to go into the country for his health handed a letter to Howe at the communion service, expressing his gratitude for the benefits he had derived from the fellowship, and asking for their prayers, 'that in some sort of such intercourse our communion may continue still, if not in body, yet in spirit.' Persecution and the ban of the Established Church drew these Nonconformists together in a society singularly pure and sweet." From what we know of the character of Howe's preaching and pastoral ability we need not hesitate to accept Calamy's statement that he went on quietly in a course of practical preaching in his stated ministry, and was very useful in forwarding many in their way to heaven. Lectures delivered in Cordwainers' Hall and Haberdashers' Hall, in addition to his Sunday sermons, have been preserved, and furnish abundant evidence of his intellectual and spiritual activity.

The Declaration of Indulgence which Charles had published in 1672, although not the outcome of any belief on the part of the king in the principles of toleration, but rather of a desire to exempt the Roman Catholics from persecution, enabled many of the Nonconformists again to exercise their ministry. The Declaration was soon revoked, and "the

Nonconformists in fact exposed to all the severe laws which had been enacted against them"; yet, "their condition was upon the whole somewhat ameliorated," and according to Calamy the liberty which the Declaration gave them, although a variable quantity, was not entirely taken away till the year 1681. Some of the Nonconformists, owing to conscientious scruples, did not avail themselves of what were their undoubted rights; but Howe considered himself free on this and subsequent occasions to seize every just and favourable opportunity of exercising his public ministry. And "such was the regard which his talents, learning and worth conciliated, that his Nonconformity did not prevent his being on the most intimate terms with many who already were, or who afterwards became, some of the most distinguished ornaments of the Establishment. Amongst others may be mentioned Stillingfleet, afterwards Bishop of Worcester; Tillotson, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury; Sharp, afterwards Archbishop of York; Drs. Whichcot, Kidder, Fowler, and Lucas."

During the year following his return to London Howe published, at the request of the Hon. Robert Boyle, the little treatise completed in Antrim entitled: *The Reconcilableness of God's Prescience of the Sins of Men with the Wisdom and Sincerity of His Counsels and Exhortations*. This dissertation, "mostly huddled up in the intervals of a troublesome, long journey," appears to have given much offence to some of the author's old college friends, and it was attacked by Theophilus Gale in the fourth part of his famous book: *The Court of the Gentiles*; by John Troughton, an ejected minister, in *A Letter to a Friend, touching God's Prescience about Sinful Actions*; and by Thomas Danson (who had been an intimate friend of Howe's at Magdalen) in *De causa Dei*.

The controversy is worth recalling, chiefly for the fact that Howe was championed by that master of wit and satire, Andrew Marvell. In his reply to Danson Marvell pays a fine tribute to Howe. Writing on the question in dispute he says: "But, if any man there be that can reconcile this controversy, and so many more that arise out of it (for all the most important doctrines of Christianity serve on the one side; and all the fiercest questions of religion on the other, depending for truth and falsehood upon the success of this engagement); if he can extinguish all those ill-consequences, dull distinctions, and

inconsistent notions, which have been levied in this quarrel, and reduce each party within the due limits of Scripture and saving knowledge; such a person indeed deserves all commendation. And such an one I thought I had met with, nor yet see reason, notwithstanding all the late attempts upon him, to alter my opinion." After dealing in his lively and inimitable way with Howe's opponents, Marvell concludes by affirming that it is the same for such a divine as Howe to turn common disputant, "as for an architect to saw timber, or cleave logs; which, though he may sometimes do it for health or exercise, yet to be constant at it, were to debase and neglect his vocation. Mr. Howe hath work enough cut out of a nobler nature, in his *Living Temple*, in which, like that of Solomon, there is 'neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron to be heard,' nothing that can offend, all to edify. And this, I heartily wish that he may accomplish; but therefore, as he hath not hitherto sought, so that he would avoid all contention; lest, as David, for having been a man of blood, was forbid to build the temple, so he, as being a man of controversy."

During the reign of Charles II. the country was constantly aroused by fears of Roman Catholicism, and at these seasons of panic the Nonconformists were regarded by many of the more moderate men in the Church of England as possible comrades in the coming hour of trial. Overtures towards comprehension had been made several times but had ended in failure. Howe never ceased to hope and work for some scheme which should adjust differences, and at this period of his career of increasing influence he was specially active in urging at every favourable opportunity the vital need of presenting a united front towards all advances of the Papists. He maintained, in common with all enlightened Protestants, that the one sure method of confirming the nation in the Protestant faith was that of unflinching fidelity to the evangelical truth which was the common possession of Nonconformity and Established Church alike.

Calamy relates an incident which, although it lacks names and date, must have occurred about this time. "A certain nobleman, who was at that time great at court"—undoubtedly the notorious Duke of Buckingham—expressed a desire to see Howe, a desire which was gratified with little delay. In the course of conversation the Duke hinted that

"the Nonconformists were too numerous and powerful to be any longer neglected; that they deserved regard; and that, if they had a friend near the throne, and who possessed influence with the court generally, to give them advice in critical emergencies and to convey their request to the royal ear, they would find it much to their advantage." It is known that Buckingham posed, from time to time, as a specially liberal-minded man and for his own purposes made many and persistent efforts to conciliate the sectaries. When therefore Howe perceived that the Duke desired to become the advocate and representative of the Nonconformists at court, he politely but promptly replied "that the Nonconformists, being an avowedly *religious* people, it highly concerned them, should they fix on any one for the purpose mentioned, to choose someone who would not be ashamed of *them*, and of whom *they* might have no reason to be ashamed; and that to find a person in whom there was a concurrence of those two qualifications, was exceedingly difficult." There was no mistaking the meaning of this reply; the Nonconformists had no mind to negotiate with the politicians of the court of Charles.

With the year 1680 Howe was again brought into ecclesiastical controversy. Dean Stillingfleet (who twenty years previously had published his *Irenicum*, in which he contended that no form of Church government could be proved to be *jure divino* from any passages of the New Testament) preached a sermon on the 2nd of May, 1680, before the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of the city, and the Judges and Serjeants, which was afterwards published under the title of *The Mischief of Separation*. This sermon was a bitter denunciation of the dissenters as schismatics, affirming that upon them alone lay the guilt of the great division which had rent the Established Church in twain. Stillingfleet went on to maintain "that though the *really conscientious* Nonconformist is justified in not worshipping after the prescribed forms of the Church of England, or rather would be *criminal* if he did so, yet he is not less criminal in setting up a *separate assembly*."

This extraordinary sermon naturally provoked much opposition; among others Owen, Baxter, Alsop and the philosopher John Locke raised their emphatic protests—Locke speaking of the traduced dissenters as those "who agree with us perfectly in doctrine, and are excluded

from our communion, not by the desire of more, but by their scruples against many, of those ceremonies we have in our church." When the sermon was printed Howe was out of town; but "a person of quality in the city," Sir Thomas Abney, who had "taken offence" at Stillingfleet's extraordinary outburst, sent it to Howe together with an enclosed letter. Howe, in his reply written in a spirit of beautiful magnanimity, expressed his intention, first, "of defending the cause of the Nonconformists against the Dean, and then of adding something in defence of the Dean against his correspondent." He cannot blame the "person of quality" for being in some measure offended; he can excuse the Dean only in part—disliking especially "his too great acrimony, and too little seriousness"; nevertheless, he believes "that this blow came only from the (somewhat misgoverned) hand of a pious and good man," and he is "highly confident (notwithstanding what he hath said in it), if it were in his power, we might even safely trust him to prescribe us terms, and should receive no hard ones from him."

Howe's refutation of Stillingfleet was unanswerable, and couched in so gentle a spirit of conciliation that Stillingfleet was moved to confess "that Howe had discoursed gravely and piously, more like a gentleman than a divine, without any mixture of rancour or any sharp reflections, and sometimes with a great degree of kindness towards him, for which, and his prayers for him, he heartily thanked him."

Howe pointed out that "in the more populous and frequented places" the Church was not able to receive "half the people belonging to them," and argued that "good men should not be offended that multitudes do in this distress relieve themselves by resorting to other places for necessary instruction." "If," writes Howe, "we were all to be good Churchmen, worthy Dean, there were not enough buildings or priests for us. But further, of the priests provided some are not all that could be desired, and we cannot all be satisfied in conscience to entrust our souls and spiritual concernment to the pastoral care and conduct of the parochial ministry only." Nonconformists cannot "sit under the ministry of a noted drunkard or open enemy to godliness." Further, separation becomes a necessity so long as the Church insists upon, not the nature of the gospel, but doubtful and "unessential factors as terms of communion." Howe says the right word when he asserts that "without all controversy the main inlet

of all the distractions, confusions, and divisions of the Christian world hath been by adding other conditions of Church communion than Christ hath done."

In the same year Dr. Tillotson, Dean of Canterbury, was summoned suddenly by the Lord Chamberlain to preach before the King, the Royal Chaplain being unwell. Choosing *Joshua xxiv. 15* as his text, the preacher developed his thesis: "That no man is obliged to preach against the religion of his country, though a false one, unless he has the power of working miracles." The King was asleep during the sermon, but at the close a courtier stepped up and said: "It is a pity your Majesty slept, for we have had the rarest piece of Hobbism that ever you heard in your life." "Odsfish!" the King cried, "he shall print it then." This was accordingly done, and Tillotson, following his custom, sent a copy to Howe, who replied in a long letter of expostulation.

Calamy has preserved the substance of Howe's letter. He is convinced that Tillotson's sermon was "directly opposed to all the principles on which alone the Reformation could be justified"; asserts "that Calvin and Luther were, happily for mankind, of a very different mind; that the Christian religion being already confirmed by miracles, was not to be repealed every time a wicked governor chose to establish a *false* religion"; and "that consequently its ministers were bound publicly to advocate it, even though they could not work miracles." Howe concluded by expressing his profound regret that in a sermon directed professedly against the Papists, Tillotson should in this manner have pleaded "the Popish cause against the Fathers of the Reformation." Howe delivered the letter in person to the Dean, who, after looking through its contents, suggested that they should discuss the matter as they drove into the country. Agreeing to dine together with Lady Falconbridge, the daughter of Oliver Cromwell, at Sutton Court, they argued the question at length on their journey. Tillotson was completely convinced by Howe's reasonings, and "fell to weeping freely, and said that was the most unhappy thing that had of a long time befallen him," pleading in extenuation that, "having little time for preparation, he had fastened on the topic which was at that period uppermost in the public mind, the fear of Popery; and lastly, that immediately after he had delivered the sermon, he received the king's command to print it, which rendered all revision impossible."

Following the debate in parliament during the session of 1680, when the Whigs desired to effect the comprehension of the Presbyterians and Independents in the Established Church, and generally to strengthen the Protestantism of the country, Howe was invited by Dr. Lloyd, the Bishop of St. Asaph, to dine with him. Howe was engaged on the day named, but the bishop replied "that since Mr. Howe could not dine with him," he would "meet him at Dr. Tillotson's." When they met the bishop asked Howe: "What would satisfy the Nonconformists, if an attempt should be made to adjust the differences between them and the Church?" After stating that "as all had not the same latitude, he could answer only for himself," Howe replied that he believed "a very considerable obstacle would be removed, if the law were so framed as to enable ministers to attempt *parochial reformation*." "For that reason," said Lloyd, "I am for abolishing the lay chancellors, as being the great hindrance to such reformation." Another meeting was arranged for the day following at the deanery of St. Paul's, to which Dr. Bates was also invited on Howe's suggestion. Dr. Stillingfleet, who "had provided a handsome treat" for his visitors, awaited them at seven the following evening, but the bishop did not appear. The next morning brought the explanation. Lloyd had been occupied in the House of Lords, where the Bill for excluding James II., then Duke of York, from the succession, on the ground of his being a Papist, had been thrown out by a majority of thirty, fourteen of these votes coming from the bench of bishops.

After this, the suggested scheme of comprehension was dropped; but the Whigs passed a measure declaring that the prosecution of the dissenters upon the penal laws "was grievous to the subject, a weakening of the Protestant interest, an encouragement to Popery, and dangerous to the peace of the kingdom."

CHAPTER VI

Conformity and Nonconformity

WE come now to the period of Howe's history when bitter hostility and persecution reached their height. Nonconformists were no longer afforded the faintest shadow of protection against civil and ecclesiastical tyranny. Rogers points out that not only were the harsh laws which had been expressly enacted against them enforced with the utmost rigour, but laws which had never been intended to apply to them—laws which were made against the Papists in the reign of Elizabeth—had been recently revived, and were now vigorously acted on, in defiance of the late vote of the House of Commons. The great body of the bishops and the clergy supported with great zeal the designs of the government, "incited the civil magistrate to greater severity, and put into motion all the crushing machinery of the ecclesiastical courts."

Even Howe with his conspicuous moderation and prudence did not escape, although he did not suffer the severities and barbarities which many of his brethren were compelled to endure. During the years 1681–1683 he "rarely ventured into the streets" by daylight; and "on one occasion, about this time, his meeting was disturbed by the emissaries of persecution, while he was preaching, and seven of his hearers committed to Newgate—amongst whom was the Rev. Richard Dowley, one of the ejected ministers, in the account of whose life this circumstance is preserved."

But, as we gather from Neal, other Nonconformists suffered much more acutely. Edward Bury, who assisted at a fast (observed in consequence of the prolonged drought), was fined £20; as he had not preached on the occasion, he contended that he had not broken the law and refused to pay; the consequence of his action was that his goods, his books, and even

the bed he lay on, were distrained. Philip Henry was seized and fined £40, which he declined to pay, and "the sheriff's officers carried off 33 loads of corn which lay cut upon the ground." For five inoffensive sermons Richard Baxter was fined £195, and "was dragged out of his sick-bed by the constables. His physician rescued him from this outrage, but his house was rifled and all his beloved books were seized." Neither did the laity escape the fire of persecution; in one district alone—"the village of Hackney"—warrants were issued for distrains to the amount of £1,460.

During this period Howe was engaged in writing and in preparing for publication a number of his smaller works. Among these may be mentioned *Thoughtfulness for the Morrow*, and his very fine discourse *On Charity in Reference to other Men's Sins*. The first named piece was dedicated to his friend Lady Ann Wharton at whose request it was written. In it he treats of the secret of the soul's rest, which in brief is "to bear an equal temper of mind towards all conditions; to live always in this region of changes expecting the worst, at least not to expect rest on earth; to familiarise to ourselves the thought of troubles, apprehending, as to those that are private, we are always liable." He concludes: "Let our thoughts fly over earth and time; they will be purer and less tainted. Let them centre in God; they will be more steady, composed and calm. Fixedly apprehend Him to be most wise, holy, good, powerful, *and ours*. Let our heart quietly trust in Him as such, and be subject to Him, contented to follow. He will lead the blind in a way that they know not, and, if we betake ourselves wholly to Him, will be our guide for ever and ever, our God and our guide even unto death." It is evident that this conclusion had been beaten out on the anvil of the author's own deep experience. The second named composition was a sermon published by request; its occasion was as follows. "A person who had been a colleague of Howe, and whose name was Daniel Bull, having been betrayed into some grievous immorality, the irreligious, as usual, set up a shout of triumph: Howe, who was ever ready to throw the mantle of love over the failing of an erring brother, exposed from the pulpit, in a most cogent manner, the malignity and folly of such exultation." Calamy states that this painful case of Daniel Bull was "a single instance among the Nonconformists of 1662." It is pleasing to add that the transgressor "was afterwards restored, in his

character and work, and closed his life as a useful and respected minister."

In 1682 Howe published his discourse on *The Argument in Prayer from the Name of God*; the sermon preached "at the anniversary thanksgiving for a great deliverance," and addressed to the Earl of Kildare, entitled: *Self-Dedication*; and the funeral sermon for the Rev. Richard Fairclough: *The Faithful Steward Applauded and Rewarded*. In addition to these works Howe wrote *The Annotations on St. John's Epistles*, which formed a part of Pool's *Annotations*, vol. ii. During this year Howe had been in very indifferent health, but after a short summer holiday we find him at work again among his books with unabated energy. From literary references it is clear that books on law were engaging much of Howe's attention, and Dr. Horton surmises (not unwarrantably) "that during these years when law was trampled under foot, when the judges were the tools of the prerogative, and when Sydney and Russell lost their heads for defending the trampled liberties and outraged constitution of England, the solitary minister was engaged in studying and understanding the spirit of the English law."

In 1683 Howe published the important and characteristic treatise on *Union among Protestants*. This was "an answer to the question: 'What may most hopefully be attempted to allay animosities among Protestants, so that our divisions may not be our ruin?'" Howe's position, a position which he had early advanced and from which he never retreated, was expressed in the affirmation that "union can be gained only by dwelling on substantials and retreating from accidentals." No subject was nearer or dearer to his heart, and perhaps no contemporary possessed qualifications more admirably adapted to do justice to the theme. "Here," says Rogers, "his enlarged and truly catholic spirit, his superiority to all the littleness of party feeling, his absorbing solicitude for the interest of *real* religion, whatever its outward forms, display themselves to the greatest advantage." Taking as his text *Colossians* ii. 2, he disavows any intention of discussing "what might be attempted towards remedying the evils in question by laws and public constitutions"; his aim is to insist on "the great *moral means*, by which a unity might be secured far more noble than that of identity of opinion." This object may be expected, and can only be effected "by the maintaining sincere love among Christians, and the improving of

their faith to greater measures of clearness, certainty and efficiency, in reference to the *substantials* of Christianity." The entire absence of all the bitterness so often manifested by party spirit, and the presence of that divine charity which hopeth all things, make this treatise of Howe's memorable alike for manner and matter. Where men's tastes and preferences in favour of some particular ecclesiastical polity differ, a wise toleration ought to be exercised. "They are no rule to us; but it should less become us to suspect their sincerity than our own." The vital thing is to be persuaded "of the infinitely greater importance of those things in which Christians agree, than of those in which they differ"; and Howe confesses: "I must avow it to all the world, it is not this or that external form I so much consider in the matter of Christian union or communion, as what spirit reigns in them with whom I would associate myself." As Dr. Horton well says: "It appears that Howe's Nonconformity is really catholicity."

On the 20th July, 1683, Lord Russell (on the plea of the Rye House Plot) was beheaded in Lincoln's Inn Fields "in atrocious violation of every principle of equity and justice." Lady Russell, who had maintained an attitude of heroic fortitude in face of this overwhelming calamity, received from Howe (who withheld his name) that most touching letter of consolation which fortunately has been preserved by the Russell family. After stating that the writer's design will be abundantly answered if the contents of the letter prove useful to the recipient, Howe goes on to say that as the noble widow's affliction hath been great, unspeakably beyond what it is in the writer's power or design to represent, so the divine supports "have been very extraordinary," "such as wherein all that have observed or heard, could not but acknowledge a divine hand." But the affliction "was not limited and enclosed within the limits of one black day," nor "like those more common ones, the sense whereof abates and wears off by time; but is continued, and probably more felt, as time runs on; which therefore makes you need continued help from heaven every day." Howe cannot doubt that "the genuine right temper and frame of a truly Christian mind and spirit may be evidently concluded to be . . . an habitual joyfulness prevailing over all the temporary occasions of sorrow that occur to them. For none can be thought of that can preponderate, or be equal to the just and great causes of

their joy. This is the true frame, model and constitution of the kingdom of God, which ought to have place in us ; herein it consists in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." After pointing out that the cause of the present sorrow is exceeding great, he affirms that the causes of joy are inexpressibly greater. "You have infinitely more left than you have lost." Doth it need to be disputed whether God be better and greater than man ? or more to be valued, loved, and delighted in ? and whether an eternal relation be more considerable than a temporary one ? Was it not your constant sense in your best outward state : 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, O God ? and whom can I desire on earth, in comparison of Thee ?' Herein the state of your ladyship's case is still the same ; if indeed you can not with greater clearness and with less hesitation pronounce those latter words. The principal causes of your joy are immutable, such as no supervening thing can alter." Lady Russell wrote a letter of thanks to the author of this sympathetic paper, which led to further correspondence and a lifelong friendship.

In 1684 Howe published his work entitled *The Redeemer's Tears wept over Lost Souls* ; a work which according to Dr. Urwick "tells the mental and moral character of Howe as a minister, as much as anything he ever wrote."

This year, the last of Charles II.'s life, was marked by a persecution of the Nonconformists appallingly fierce and unrestrained. Rogers writes : "Not only sins of 'commission' but those of 'omission' were visited upon them : they were punished, not merely for frequenting the conventicle, but for *not* going to church, and for *not* taking the sacrament. In short, all those merciless laws which had been enacted a century before, and which bigotry, at much earlier and less enlightened periods, had often suffered to slumber, were now rigorously enforced against the unhappy dissidents." The justices of Bedford, and Barlow the Bishop of Lincoln, among others, distinguished themselves by their harsh and cruel spirit, urging the enforcement of the laws against the Nonconformists with a zeal equalled only by their malice.

A copy of the anonymous letter which Howe addressed at this time to the Bishop has been preserved, and it enables us to see clearly the nobility of spirit with which Howe met harshness and bitterness in his persecutors. After expressing surprise at Barlow's published directions to his clergy, Howe writes :

"I did read them with some trouble of mind, which I sincerely profess, was more upon your lordship's account than my own (who for myself am little concerned), or any other particular person's whatsoever. It was such as it had not been very difficult for me to have concealed in my own breast, or only to have expressed it to God in my prayers for you . . . if I had not apprehended it not utterly impossible . . . that some or other of those thoughts, which I have revolved in my own mind upon this occasion . . . might appear to your very sagacious judgment . . . some way capable of being cultivated by your own mature and second thoughts." He asks "whether it be not a supposable thing, that some persons, sound in the faith, strictly orthodox in all the articles of it taught by our Lord Jesus or his apostles, resolvedly loyal, and subject to the authority of their governors in church and state, of pious, sober, peaceable, just, charitable dispositions and deportments, may not (while they agree with your lordship in that evident principle, both by the law of nature and scripture, that their prince and inferior rulers ought to be actively obeyed in all lawful things) have a formed fixed judgment . . . of the unlawfulness of some or other of the rites and modes of worship enjoined to be observed in this church?" Further: "Is there no difference to be put between things essential to our religion, and things conferred indifferently on the one hand, and on the other judged unlawful?" Praying God to rectify the bishop's error by gentler methods and by less affliction than Barlow had designed to his brethren, Howe concludes by affirming that he does not doubt (any more for the bishop's part than his own) to meet him there, one day, "where Luther and Zuinglius are well agreed."

During the year 1685 the persecution of Nonconformists was still continued with unabated zest, and Howe's life at this point must have been little short of miserable; thus in August of that year Howe accepted Lord Wharton's invitation to travel with him abroad. Their departure was so hasty that Howe had no opportunity of taking formal leave of his flock, but he addressed to them from the Continent a farewell letter of deep interest. This letter was directed "to such in and about London, among whom I have laboured in the work of the gospel." After expressing deep regret at leaving them and his inability to communicate to them the

grounds of his taking so sudden a departure, he writes : " You will, I may be confident, be more prudent and equal, than to judge of what you do not know ; but so much I shall in the general say, that the providence of God gave me the prospect of a present quiet abode, with some opportunity of being serviceable . . . which opportunity I could not hope to have nearer you, at least without being unreasonably burdensome to some, while I was designing service, as much as in me lay, to all." He then proceeds to offer thoughts and counsels for their present help, such things as he had " often inculcated " to them, that they might be useful to stir them up, by putting them in remembrance. He concludes by committing his flock to the " blessed and faithful, and covenant keeping God," and inviting their prayers on his behalf.

We do not know the details of Howe's continental tour, but in 1686 he settled at Utrecht, in a large house, which he converted into a boarding establishment. Here many exiled ministers and others found desirable hospitality. Among others who boarded with Howe may be mentioned the Earl and Countess of Sutherland, and George and John Hughes, nephews of Howe. He joined Matthew Mead, Woodcock and Cross (also exiled from England) in conducting divine worship at the English church of the town, and preached frequently. He was able also to render valuable service to English students at the University there ; and the University people made him a welcome guest. Howe's friends at this time included Sir John Thompson (who afterwards became Lord Haversham), Sir John Guise, Sir Patience Ward and Thomas Papillon, all exiles. While at Utrecht Howe was visited by Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, who preached in the English church and openly advocated " occasional communion with those of different sentiments." In conversation with Howe Burnet advanced his opinion that Nonconformity could not last long, and that when the great leaders were laid in their graves it would die out. Howe replied that the existence of Nonconformity was bound up with *principles* rather than with *persons*. During his stay in Holland Howe had the honour of meeting William, Prince of Orange ; who shortly afterwards became King of England. The prince was evidently charmed by the grace and nobility of Howe's character, for he conversed with the exiled minister " with great freedom, and ever after maintained a great respect for him."

The *Declaration for Liberty of Conscience* was published by James II. in 1687, and Howe responded to the request of his former congregation that he should resume his ministry amongst them. Before Howe left Holland, however, he had an interview with the Prince of Orange, who "fully saw through the motives of James," and urged Howe "to offer the most strenuous resistance to the designs of the court as to the abolition of the penal laws and tests." The Indulgence of James II. was prompted by no passion for toleration, by no leniency towards Nonconformists whom he loathed, but by a desire to favour the Papists and further their designs. A few of the Nonconformists were deceived by the attitude of the king, but "when the court, more fully disclosing its designs, endeavoured to get the Nonconformists to sanction the dispensing power as applied to the Papists, the bulk of them (amongst whom Howe was foremost) sturdily refused." A meeting was held at Howe's house to consider "the advisableness of drawing up a writing to signify their concurrence with the king, as to the ends of his declaration." Two messengers were sent from the king to receive an account of the proceedings, who carried back the tidings that the Nonconformists "stood out." They would not accept from the king's hands a favour which imperilled the liberties of the nation. Howe told the king, bluntly, "that he was a minister of the gospel; that it was his province to preach, and endeavour to do good to the souls of men; but as for meddling with State affairs, he was neither inclined nor called to it, and must beg to be excused."

The year following dissatisfaction with the king's methods of government greatly increased. He insisted that his *Declaration of Indulgence* should be read by all the clergy in their respective churches. Seven bishops resisted the king's dispensing power and were committed to the Tower. For the moment bishops and Nonconformists were united by "a common dread of tyranny and Popery." At this critical time Howe was invited to dinner by Dr. Sherlock, who was then Master of the Temple. Howe accepted the invitation and found several other clergymen present. "After dinner, the conversation naturally turned on the imminent danger with which the Church was threatened." Howe was asked by Sherlock "what he thought the Nonconformists would do should the preferments of the Church become vacant, and a proposal be made that those vacancies be filled up out of the

ranks of the seceders." Suppose Mr. Howe were offered the mastership of the Temple? Howe was at first taken by surprise at the question, but at length answered that the "issue of the present perplexed state of affairs was altogether uncertain, that it was improbable that Dr. Sherlock's fears should ever be realized; that if they should, he could not venture to answer for the conduct of the Nonconformists as a body, as they were split into different parties, and as those parties were actuated by different principles; that he could answer only for *himself*; that so far as he was concerned, he did not hesitate to say, that should such an improbable case occur as that which the doctor had supposed, he should not feel himself warranted in declining altogether an opportunity of more public usefulness, should it be offered on such terms as he could conscientiously accept; but *that as for any emolument accruing from* such a situation, he should have nothing to do with it, except as the channel to convey it to the legal proprietor." Sherlock rose from his seat and, embracing Howe, expressed his delight at finding him "that ingenuous, honest man he had always supposed him to be." The seven bishops stood their trial and were acquitted amid national joy. A new day of liberty was dawning for the people; the glorious Revolution "happily dissipated the terrors which had overhung the nation during the reign of the second James, and terminated a dynasty which had been equally the curse and the disgrace of the nation."

CHAPTER VII

The Act of Toleration

FROM the year 1689 onwards Nonconformists began to enjoy the fruits of their long fight for freedom. Howe and the other heroic Nonconformist leaders who had survived entered upon a period of prosperity, after their unparalleled persecution. As Dr. Horton writes: "The man whom we have seen again and again driven from his post, a wanderer, an exile in Ireland, a suspect in London, a refugee in Holland, is permitted to labour for seventeen years of declining health but maturing spiritual power among his attached people in Silver Street, a recognised leader of the Nonconformists, respected by his sovereign and by everyone else, a potent religious influence in the metropolis."

Following upon the arrival of the Prince of Orange at St. James's Palace, an address of welcome was presented to him by Howe on behalf of the Nonconformists—the deputation being introduced by Lords Devonshire, Wharton and Wiltshire. In their address the Nonconformists "professed their grateful sense of his highness's hazardous and heroical expedition, which the favour of heaven had made so surprisingly prosperous"; "they esteemed it a common felicity, that the worthy patriots of the nobility and gentry of his kingdom had unanimously concurred unto his highness's design, by whose most prudent advice the administration of public affairs was devolved in this difficult conjuncture, into hands which the nation and the world knew to be apt for the greatest undertakings, and so suitable to the present exigence of our case"; they promised the utmost endeavours which in their stations they were capable of affording, for promoting the excellent and most desirable ends for which his highness had declared"; and "they added their continual and fervent prayers to the Almighty for the preservation of

his highness's person, and the success of his future endeavours for the defence and propagation of the Protestant interest throughout the Christian world." The prince in reply assured the deputation "that he came on purpose to defend the Protestant religion, and that it was his own religion, in which he was born and bred; the religion of his country and of his ancestors: and that he was resolved, by the grace of God, always to adhere to it, and to do his utmost endeavours for the defence of it, and the promoting a firm union among Protestants."

Early in 1689 parliament was engaged in discussing the thorny question of "Comprehension," and in this crisis when many of the High Church party, "in contravention of the solemn pledges which had been given to the Nonconformists," were again manifesting their hostility to any suggestion of reunion which did not involve submission upon the part of the Nonconformists, Howe issued his paper on *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, represented and argued*: a paper of the utmost interest. After affirming that the Nonconformists "are under one common obligation with the rest of mankind, by the universal law of nature, to worship God in assemblies," Howe urges that "whereas the religion professed in England is that of reformed Christianity, some things are annexed to the allowed public worship, which are acknowledged to be no parts thereof, nor in themselves necessary, but which the dissenters judge to be in some part sinful, they cannot therefore, with good conscience towards God, attend wholly and solely upon the public worship which the laws do appoint," and "the same laws do strictly forbid their assembling to worship God otherwise." They have however been accustomed to meet "in distinct assemblies, and to worship God in a way which their conscience could approve; and have many years continued so to do, otherwise than as they have been hindered by violence."

He inquires whether their conduct can be justified, and answers that "they could not but esteem the obligation of the universal, natural, divine law, by which they were bound solemnly to worship God, less questionable than that of a law which was only positive, topical and human, requiring such and such additaments to their worship, and prohibiting their worship without them." He argues that "the laws enjoining such additions to our religion as the

exclusive terms of Christian worship and communion" ought not to have been made "when it is acknowledged on all hands, the things to be added were before not necessary, and when it is known a great number judge them sinful, and must thereby be restrained from worshipping the true and living God." Again, "the making and execution of the laws, by which we have suffered so deeply for many by-past years, was only that Protestants might destroy Protestants, and the easier work be made for the introduction of Popery, that was to destroy the residue." Therefore "let English freemen remember, what they cannot but know, that it was for our firm adherence to the civil interests of the nation (not for our different modes of religion from the legal way, though the laws gave that advantage against us, which they did not against others) that we endured the calamities of so many years." If any think that by making concessions to dissenters "the Church of England will be ruined, and a great advantage given to the bringing in of Popery," it is sufficient to say that "the generality of the dissenters differ from the Church of England, in no substantials of doctrine and worship, no, nor of government, provided it be so managed as to attain its true acknowledged end; the favouring of us, therefore, will as much ruin the Church as its enlargement and additional strength will signify to its ruin." If it be said that "we agree not among ourselves, and know not what we would have," the pertinent question arises: "Do all that go under the name of the Church of England agree among themselves?" It is possible to "show more considerable disagreements among them, than any can between the most of us and a considerable part of them. They all agree, it is true, in Conformity; and we all agree in Nonconformity. And is not this merely accidental to Christianity and Protestantism? and herein is it not well known that the far greater part of reformed Christendom do more agree with us?" Is it reasonable, further, "to exclude all, that in everything conform not to the Church of England, from any part or share of the civil power?" Surely, "the matter is clear as the light of the sun, that as many persons of excellent worth, sobriety and godliness, are entirely in the communion of the Church of England, so there are too many of a worse character that are of it too; and divers prudent, pious and sober minded persons, that are not of it. Let common reason be consulted in this case." Is it not "the prudence

of any government, to comprehend as many useful persons as it can, and no more to deprive itself of the service of such, for anything less considerable than those qualifications are by which they are useful, than a man would tear off from himself the limbs of his body, for a spot on the skin?" Howe concludes in the following words: "the names of Mr. Hales, of Eton College, and of a later most renowned Bishop of the Church of England, who asserted this principle, that 'if things be imposed under the notion of indifferent, which many think sinful, and a schism follow thereupon, the imposers are the schismatics,' will be great in England, as long as their writings shall live, and good sense can be understood in them."

Howe and many others with him worked devotedly for comprehension, but the bill was thrown out in Parliament, and the commission which had spent both time and pains in the attempt to draw up a scheme whereby Presbyterians and Independents might be included, ended in disappointment.

In the end, however, the Act of Toleration received the king's assent on 24th May, 1689. By this Act Nonconformists obtained relief from some of the more glaring grievances under which they laboured. Taking the oath against Papal rule and supremacy, they were no longer liable to prosecution for abstaining from worship at their parish churches, although they were not permitted to worship in their own meeting houses unless such places were free from locks and bolts. They were compelled to pay their tithes and parochial dues; and their ministers were obliged to subscribe to all the Articles except xxxiv., xxxv., and xxxvi. Failing this, they would suffer the penalties of the Uniformity, Conventicle and Five Mile Acts. A register was kept of all such sworn ministers; and every congregation of Nonconformists was certified before the bishop of the diocese, his archdeacon, or a justice of the peace.

In a sermon preached by Howe seven years after the passing of the Act of Toleration, we find forcible expression given to the feeling of Nonconformists when the concession of "bare toleration" was granted to them. "In what a state of things we then were, and how our matters stood when a divine hand was reached forth towards us to pluck us out of the gulf into which we were sinking! We are to consider in how prepared a posture all things were for our destruction, as to our most principal concerns; those especially of our religion, than which we

are to count nothing more so. The providence of God ordered us a view of our danger ; not that it might overtake or oppress us, or end in our ruin, but that it might excite in us so much higher gratitude when he should deliver us. That is, in the course of providence he let it come to pass that we should be under a popish prince intent to promote his own religion ; that things should proceed so far that we should see mass houses set up even in the metropolis of England ; in this very city Jesuits' schools opened ; colleges in our Universities seized to serve the same purpose ; and an Irish army brought into our bowels, easily to be assisted, if there should be occasion, by a French one . . . And where are they now that dispute whether a providence governs this world ? Is there no specimen, no appearance of a divine hand in this ; that all the while that mighty French monarch was gradually springing up, until at length he should appear on the public stage with so aspiring a mind as to think himself capable of giving law and religion to all the world beside . . . God should be forming His own instrument to appear upon the stage too ? A prince, in such circumstances, and with such inclinations too ! formed on purpose to give check (and we hope mate too) to that ambitious one."

After the passing of the Act of Toleration party spirit ran high. Howe was genuinely distressed at regrettable excesses on both sides, and published a pamphlet entitled : *Humble Requests both to Conformists and Dissenters, touching their temper and behaviour toward each other, upon the lately passed Indulgence*. He urges both parties not to over-magnify their differences "or count them greater than they really are." "Remember that there are differences on both parts, among themselves, incomparably greater than these, by which the one sort differs from the other." . . . "Let us hereupon carefully abstain from judging each other's state God-ward upon these differences ; for hereby we shall both contradict our common rule and ourselves. When men make conscience of small and doubtful things on the one hand and the other, about which they differ, blessed God ! how little conscience is made of the plainest and most important rule, not to judge one another for such differences." . . . "Let us not value ourselves upon being of this or that side of the severing line. It is Jewish, yea, pharisaical, to be conceited, and boast ourselves upon externals, and small matters, especially if arbitrarily taken up ; and is itself an argument of a light

mind, and incomprehensive of true worth. Though I cannot sincerely be of this or that way, but I must think myself in the right, and others in the wrong that differ from me, yet I ought to consider this is but a small minute thing, a point compared with the vast orb of knowables, and of things needful, and that ought to be known. Perhaps divers that differ from me are men of greater and more comprehensive minds, and have been more employed about greater matters ; and many, in things of more importance, have much more of valuable and useful knowledge than I . . . Let us not despise one another for our differing in these lesser matters. This is too common, and most natural to that temper that offends against the foregoing caution." . . . "Nor let us wonder that we differ. Unto this we are too apt, that is, to think it strange (especially upon some arguing of the difference), that such a man should conform, or such a one not conform." . . . "It is unchristian to censure, as before, and say such a one has not my conscience, therefore he has no conscience at all ; and it is also unreasonable and rude to say, such a one sees not with my eyes, therefore he is stark blind.

Besides, the real obscurity of the matter is not enough considered. I am very confident, an impartial and competent judge, upon the view of books, later and more ancient, upon such subjects would say, there are few metaphysical questions disputed with more subtlety, than the controversies about Conformity and Nonconformity. Blessed be God that things necessary to the salvation of souls, and that are of true necessity even to the peace and order of the Christian Church, are in comparison so very plain." . . . "Let us not be offended mutually with one another, for our different choice of this or that way, wherein we find most of real advantage and edification." . . . "Above all, let us, with sincere minds, more earnestly endeavour the promoting the interest of religion itself, of true reformed Christianity, than of this or that party. Let us long to see the religion of Christians become simple, primitive, agreeable to its lovely original state, and again itself ; and each in our own stations contribute thereto all that we are able, labouring that the internal principle of it may live and flourish in our own souls, and be to our utmost diffused and spread unto other men's. And for its externals, as the ducture of our rule will guide us, so gradually bend towards one common course, that there may at length cease to be any divided parties at all."

We have seen that comprehension and corporate reunion was impossible ; and fair as is the dream, it can hardly be doubted the circumstances (unhappy in themselves) which created and shaped the course of Nonconformity have resulted in unspeakable gain to the life of the nation. J. R. Green justly observes that "the Toleration Act established a group of religious bodies, whose religious opposition to the Church forced them to support the measures of progress which the Church opposed. With religious forces on the one side and on the other, England has escaped the great stumbling-block in the way of nations where the cause of religion has become identified with that of political reaction."

CHAPTER VIII

Controversy, Controversialists and Calm

IT is a curious fact that a man like Howe, to whom controversy was essentially uncongenial, was engaged for so many years of his life in ecclesiastical disputes which engendered no little bitterness. Following immediately upon the glorious Revolution and their newly won liberty, the Nonconformists fell a prey to internal strife and disunion. Suspicion, jealousy and prejudice brought their inevitable evil consequences, and the "heads of agreement" drawn up by the "united ministers" (among whom Howe occupied an influential position) failed in their object; which was to unite the Presbyterians and Independents. It was not intended as a measure for any national constitution, but for the preservation of order in Nonconformist congregations, "that cannot come up to the common rule by law established." The resolutions had the assent of the leading men of both the denominations, but, notwithstanding this fact, they failed to achieve their purpose.

While Howe himself manifested none of the too common bitterness of the partisan, but, on the contrary, pleaded with all his accustomed tact and courtesy for peace and unity, the prevalent temper of the controversialists made agreement impossible.

A further bitter dispute arose on the republication of Dr. Crisp's works. Dr. Crisp had been an Antinomian, and after his death his works together with some additional discourses were printed by his son. The editor solicited "the signature of several of the most deservedly popular ministers in the metropolis to an attestation, that they believed the sermons in question to be the genuine productions of Dr. Crisp." Among the signatories was Howe; and although he protested against the absurdity of confounding a simple

attestation of the *genuineness* of a document with a belief in the *truth* of its contents, "the explanation was not regarded as satisfactory. Richard Baxter wrote a protest, and was on the point of publishing it when Howe, hearing of it, hastened to him, and conjured him to suppress it," promising Baxter to add his name to a book refuting the errors of Antinomianism which John Flavel was preparing for the press. The controversy, however, waged long and fiercely; but Howe meantime, eschewing such strife, delivered at the Merchants' Lecture in Broad Street the beautiful discourses afterwards published under the title of *The Carnality of Religious Contention*. Of the preface of these sermons Dr. Horton remarks that it alone would justify the publication; while Mr. Spademan (Howe's coadjutor) stated in the sermon which he preached on Howe's death: "It breathes so heavenly a charity and concern for the truly Christian interest, that a very eminent divine of the Established Church did profess a willingness to lay down his own life, if such a state of things as is there described might obtain among Christians." Their tributes are well deserved. Taking as his text the words: *Walk in the spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh*. Howe points out that "the very defence of truth may be accompanied with such carnalities, such strife, wrath, malice, envy, as divides the guilt between the divided parties, and leaves neither side innocent." Thus this baneful spirit may appear in those who are contending for what is, undoubtedly, the truth; also "it displays itself when Christians, who are very far agreed in the most important things, make little of the things wherein they are agreed, though ever so great, in comparison of the much less things wherein they differ when we consider with too little indulgence one another's mistakes and misapplications in the use, even of scripture words, placing them (as some may do) upon things to which they do not properly belong, when yet they agree about the things themselves when we are over intent to mould and square gospel truths and doctrines by human measures and models, and too earnestly strive to make them correspond when any do with great zeal contend for this or that opinion or notion as very sacred and highly spiritual, with no other design than that under that pretence they may indulge their own carnal inclination with the greater liberty when, in maintaining any doctrine of the gospel in opposition

to others, we industriously set ourselves to pervert their meaning, and impute things to them that they never say ; or if we charge their opinions whom we oppose with consequences which they disclaim." Howe concludes : " Let us labour to divest ourselves, and strike off from our spirits, everything that shall not go with us to heaven, or is equally unsuitable to our end and way ; that there may be nothing to obstruct or hinder our abundant entrance at length into the everlasting kingdom."

The theological controversy which arose in the Established Church on the doctrine of the Trinity was the occasion of Howe's *Calm Discourse of the Trinity in the Godhead*. Howe protests : " I will not call the Anti-trinitarians by the inept name of Unitarians (as they more lately affect to call themselves), which as rightfully belongs to them whose adversaries they are pleased to be as to themselves, and therefore cannot distinguish the one from the other." God expects men to " deport themselves towards him according to the light which they have, not which they have not." Howe regards " human, and even all created minds very incompetent judges of the divine simplicity. We know not what the divine nature may include consistently with its own perfection, nor what it must, as necessary thereto. Our eye is no judge of corporeal simplicity. In darkness it discerns nothing but simplicity without distinction of things ; in dusky light the whole horizon appears most simple, and everywhere like itself ; in brighter light we perceive great varieties, and much greater if a microscope assist our eye. But of all the aerial people that replenish the region (except rare appearances to very few) we see none. Here want not objects, but a finer eye." Wherefore, " if a voice which we acknowledge divine speak to us out of the profound abyss and tell us of grateful varieties and distinctions in it : Good God, shall we not believe it ? Or shall we say we clearly see *that* is not which only *we* do not see ? This seems like somewhat worse than blindness."

In 1695 Howe published the sermon preached on the death of Queen Mary, entitled : *Heaven a State of Perfection*. The discourse was dedicated to Lady Russell ; and is, according to one of his biographers, the most interesting of all Howe's published sermons. As we stand by the open graves of Christians, " we should look," Howe writes, " upon funeral solemnities

for such, with more prospect than retrospect, and consider them as directing our eyes less downward to our own forsaken world than upwards to the celestial regions and inhabitants. To such to die is to be born ; they die only out of our mean world, and are born into a most glorious one. Their funerals should be celebrations of their ascent ; and an exulting joy should . . . not be quite banished from funeral sorrows, but be allowed to mingle therewith as sunbeams glittering in a cloud."

About this time divisions arose among the Nonconformists, who had established a Tuesday Lecture at Pinners' Hall, where Howe with others regularly preached. Daniel Williams (the founder of the Library in Gordon Square) was excluded from Pinners' Hall, and joined by Howe, Bates and Alsop, he established a new Thursday Lecture at Salters' Hall. Rogers writes that Howe's first sermon at this new Lecture, preached from the text Isaiah lxiv. 7, is said to have been deeply affecting.

In this year also, "within eight months of one another, died Howe's old patron and his lady, the Viscount and Viscountess Massarene." Howe sent a characteristically tender letter of consolation to Lady Hoghton on the "loss of two such parents." "I pray you," he writes, "let it be remembered in the first place, with serious gratitude, (for we are required in everything to give thanks,) that God continued to you the comfort of such relations so long, and for the many mercies he made them instrumental of to you, in your tender years ; that he vouchsafed to you the blessing of so excellent an education by their means ; that you were thereby brought to know Him and His Christ."

The events of Howe's life during the two following years are shrouded in uncertainty. Not improbably, as one writer has suggested, "they were years of much suffering and of slackened energy." We find, however, that on December 2nd, 1697, the day of thanksgiving for the peace of Ryswick, Howe preached a sermon, dedicated to Lord Haversham, "to celebrate the divine goodness in preserving our King abroad, and restoring him home in safety, after he had been the happy instrument of bringing about that peace which puts a period to a long continued, wasting, and dubious war, under which we and all Europe have groaned these divers years."

Our record of Howe's life during 1698 is confined to

three letters; one dated January 14th to Sir Charles and Lady Hoghton on the loss of their son, and two to his revered friend Spilsbury, who was nearing his end; letters which breathe a sincere and ardent affection. The following year was one of stress and deep anxiety for Howe. Two of his oldest and most intimate friends, the Rev. Matthew Mead and the Rev. Dr. Bates, passed away, and Howe preached their funeral sermons. "I know no good man," said Howe, "that knowing Dr. Bates would not say: 'Let me die with him.' I very well know who would; and if breasts could be laid open to inspection as by a glass, do know in whose breast this sense would be found engraven as with the point of a diamond: 'O that my soul were in his soul's stead!'"

It was about this time that Howe's friend Thoresby, who had for a long period "conformed" occasionally, but was a member of Dr. Manlove's church in Leeds, seceded to the Church of England. Thoresby had argued that "if occasional communion was lawful, constant communion was a duty"; but Howe retorts that as the Church of England had made other terms of communion than Christ laid down, and further, claimed to be the *sole* communion in England, Nonconformity was the inevitable, the necessary result of this assumption. "And if such a cause, to which so great a part of God's heritage in England have borne witness, by about forty years' sufferings, and to which God hath borne witness by the great success and blessing He hath given to them in their tabernacles (when in this way they have endeavoured to keep alive a sense of religion in a time when hell was endeavouring the total extirpation and extinction of it), shall be deserted and given up by a man of Mr. T.'s abilities, upon such a trifle of an argument, it will stand without him; but I should be sorry that he should lose the things he hath wrought."

This letter foreshadows the great controversy, the last in which Howe was engaged, on "Occasional Conformity" which took place in 1701. Many of the Nonconformists, both ministers and laymen, were accustomed to attend occasionally the services of the Established Church. Among others who practised "occasional conformity" was Sir Thomas Abney, a member of Howe's congregation; and this gentleman became Lord Mayor of London. Daniel Defoe thereupon published an anonymous pamphlet: *Inquiry into the Occasional Conformity of Dissenters*, in which he made the insinuation (for which there was no justification) that Sir Thomas Abney occasionally

conformed as a qualification for civil office. Defoe, in his preface, called upon Howe "either to vindicate the practice or to condemn it." Howe replied, though with evident reluctance, in a small pamphlet, written it must be confessed with astonishing asperity, entitled : *Some Considerations of a Preface to an Inquiry concerning the Occasional Conformity of Dissenters*. In the introduction Howe justifies his own consistency in the matter by his well known view that there was a great difference between an *occasional* compliance with rites and ceremonies not judged unlawful and "acquiescence in the oaths and subscriptions required by the Act of Uniformity." The mere act of communion with the Church of England does not imply an *ex animo* assent and consent to everything contained in the Thirty-nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer. Further, it is to be remembered that all the early Nonconformists did not secede from the Established Church for the same reasons. Therefore, the question of "occasional conformity" must be determined "by the *nature* of the objections on which the person seceding justified his secession ; in other words, by the state of the individual conscience." Defoe held the extreme position "that if the Church of England was wrong it was a sin to commune with her, and that if a Dissenter had committed this sin, he could only be received back into a true Church as a *penitent*." Such a view was intensely repugnant to Howe, and, as Dr. Horton remarks, it is significant that the only recorded occasion on which Howe lost his temper was "in the defence of that Church from which he was a dissenter."

On the accession of Queen Anne hostilities were recommenced against the Nonconformists, Dr. Sacheverel especially distinguishing himself by his bitter spirit of intolerance. An attempt was made to penalise the Dissenters by decreeing that "unless a man maintained constant communion with the Establishment, he should be utterly incapacitated for holding any civil office."

A Bill to this effect was introduced into the House of Commons, but "thanks to the wisdom of the Whig Peers" it was emphatically rejected. While the Bill however was under discussion, the following incident took place : "As Howe was one day walking in St. James's Park, a noble Lord, to whom he was well known, sent his footman to say that he desired to speak with him. When he came up, his lordship saluted him with much cordiality, and told him that he was

glad to see him. He then entered into conversation on the obnoxious Bill, which he assured Howe 'he had opposed to the utmost.' Gradually getting warm upon the subject, he so far forgot his company as to say : 'Damn these wretches for they are mad, and will bring us all into confusion.' Howe calmly replied : 'My Lord, it is a great satisfaction to us, who in all affairs of this nature desire to look upwards, that there is a God that governs the world, to whom we can leave the issues and events of things ; and we are satisfied and may thereupon be easy, that he will not fail, in due time, of making a suitable retribution to all, according to their present carriage. And this great Ruler of the world, my lord, has among other things also declared, he will make a difference between him that *swareth* and him that *feareth an oath*.' His lordship was struck with Howe's reply, and after a pause said : 'Sir, I thank you for your freedom, I understand your meaning, I shall endeavour to make a good use of it.' Howe adroitly answered : 'My lord, I have a great deal more reason to thank your lordship for saving me the most difficult part of a discourse, which is the *application*.'

During 1702, although Howe's health was failing, his clearness and acuteness of mind were undiminished. In this year he published the second part of his *Living Temple*, and dedicated it to Lord Pagett, Baron of Beaudesert, in the county of Stafford. He still continued to minister to his congregation in Silver Street. In November, 1703, "amidst much other business, and great infirmities that are sufficiently monitory to be unconcerned for the gratifying of curiosity," Howe published a sermon preached on the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, in which the Church of Rome was cited as "the power of darkness" from which England had been divinely delivered. The following year, suffering from "long languishings," his mind was much occupied with thoughts of the blessedness of the future life ; and in 1705, a few weeks before his death, he published his last work, a discourse *Of Patience in Expectation of Future Blessedness*. This was the theme on which he had spoken at the funeral of Dr. Henry Sampson—a friend greatly beloved ; and it breathes the beauty of those thoughts which haunted Howe's mind during the long last months of his life.

Among the friends who visited him during the time in which he was confined to his house in St. John's Street, Smithfield, was Richard Cromwell. Calamy writes : "There

was a great deal of serious discourse between them ; tears were freely shed on both sides ; and the parting was very solemn, as I have been informed by one that was present on the occasion." Towards the end he rallied somewhat, remarking to one of his friends that "he was for feeling that he was *alive*, though most willing to die and lay the clog of mortality aside."

To his son Dr. George Howe he said : "I am not afraid of *dying*, but I am afraid of pain." He passed into rest on Monday, April 2nd, 1705, and was buried in the parish church of All Hallows, Bread Street. His funeral sermon was preached by his friend and colleague, Mr. John Spademan, who chose as his text the words : "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, *knowing of whom thou hast learned them.*" To Howe himself his life appeared "very faulty, fruitless" ; but others judged far otherwise. "I affirm," said Mr. Spademan, "that God had given him an uncommon skill in the word of righteousness, from whence he always drew all that he taught. He had peculiar advantages for understanding the oracles of God ; a large fund of natural endowments, improved by super-added preparatives into the study of the Scriptures ; a rich treasure of human learning despised by none but the ignorant ; particularly a thorough knowledge of pagan theology, by which he was enabled to destroy the shortness and mistakes of human reason ; which faculty he very well understood to use in subordination unto Christian faith, whose mysteries he was able to free from the objections of cavillers." . . . "I can truly profess that I have not known any who hath so nearly resembled the pattern of St. Paul as he whom we lament. How naturally and with inward solicitude did he care for your estate ! How oft hath he ministered in this place, when his infirmities made such a service hazardous to his life !" . . . "His charity was not a narrow spring, limited and confined to a small spot, but, like an ocean, sent forth refreshing streams without distinction. . . . When it is the reproachful character of our age that all seek their own things, are intent on building their own houses, and raising their families, he was intent on building-up living temples unto God."

Howe's character is admirably reflected in his works. According to Rogers *The Blessedness of the Righteous* gives "a more accurate, as well as more impressive idea of the author,

than the most elaborate description of the ablest biographer." The style of Howe's writings cannot be said to be alluring to the modern reader, though many of his letters and fugitive pieces possess a distinct literary charm and reflect a most gracious personality. His *Living Temple* will probably always claim its readers. His life was distinguished by the all too rare combination of a supreme fidelity to conscience with the very perfect grace of Christian charity. He exemplified what he preached. "Never think," he said, "your religious and devotional exercises can acquit you, or supply the want and excuse the absence of sobriety and righteousness. Exercise a just authority over ourselves; keep your imagination, passions, sensitive appetite, under a due restraint, so as to be moderate in your desires and enjoyments, patient as to your wants and sufferings. Do to others as you would be done unto. Study common good. Endeavour, so far as your capacity can extend, that all about you may be the better for you. Forbear and forgive the injurious, relieve the necessitous, delight in good men, pity the bad. Be grateful towards friends, mild and unvengeful towards enemies, just towards all." Only on this wise will the *Living Temple* be established; for "it is a structure to which there is a concurrence of truth and holiness; the former letting in a vital, directive, formative light; the latter, a heavenly, calm, and godlike frame of spirit."

THE END.

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